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1c922 U.S. PTO

UTILITY PATENT APPLICATION TRANSMITTAL

(Only for new nonprovisional applications under 37 C.F.R. § 1.53(b))

Attorney Docket No.

0818.ACB.PT

First Inventor or Application Identifier

Daniel M. Jensen

Title

APPARATUS FOR FORMING LIGHTWEIGHT
CONCRETE BLOCK

Express Mail Label No.

EL593619818US

09/14/00

09/14/00

09/14/00

APPLICATION ELEMENTS and ACCOMPANYING APPLICATION PARTS

Enclosed for filing, please find the following items:

Address To:

Assistant Commissioner for Patents
Box Patent Application
Washington, D.C. 20231☐ This application is filed Missing Parts

1. ☒ Specification [Total Pages 85]
2. ☒ Drawing(s) [Total Sheets 23]
☒ Informal ☐ Formal
3. ☒ Oath/Declaration, Power of Attorney, and Petition
 - a. ☒ Newly executed (original or copy)
 - b. ☐ Copy from a prior application (37 C.F.R. § 1.63(d)) (for continuation/divisional with Box 14 completed)
 - i. ☐ Deletion of Inventor(s): Signed statement attached deleting inventor(s) named in the prior application, see 37 C.F.R. §§ 1.63(d)(2) and 1.33(b).
4. ☒ Small Entity Statement
 - a. ☒ Newly executed (original or copy)
 - i. ☐ For an independent inventor
 - ii. ☒ For a small business concern
 - iii. ☐ For a non-profit organization
 - b. ☐ Copy from a prior application (for continuation/divisional with Box 14 completed)
5. ☒ Assignment with cover sheet
6. ☐ Information Disclosure Statement (IDS)
 - a. ☐ PTO-1449
 - b. ☐ Copies of IDS citations
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			SMALL ENTITY		NON- SMALL ENTITY	
FOR	NO. FILED	NO. EXTRA	RATE	FEE	RATE	FEE
BASIC FEE				\$380		\$760
TOT. CLAIMS	25-20 =	5	5x 9 =	\$ 45	x 18 =	\$
IND. CLAIMS	2-03 =	0	x 39 =	\$ 0	x 78 =	\$
MULTIPLE DEPENDENT CLAIMS PRESENTED			\$130		\$260	
ASSIGNMENT FILING FEE			\$40	\$ 40	\$40	
			TOTAL	\$465	TOTAL	

UTILITY PATENT APPLICATION TRANSMITTAL <small>(Only for new nonprovisional applications under 37 C.F.R. § 1.53(b))</small>	Attorney Docket No.		0818.ACB.PT
	First Inventor or Application Identifier		Daniel M. Jensen
	Title	APPARATUS FOR FORMING LIGHTWEIGHT CONCRETE BLOCK	
	Express Mail Label No.		EL593619818US

9. ☒ Preliminary Amendment
10. ☐ English Translation Document *(if applicable)*
11. ☐ Certified Copy of Priority Document(s)
12. ☐ Microfiche Computer Program *(Appendix)*
13. ☐ Nucleotide and/or Amino Acid Sequence Submission *(if applicable, all necessary)*
- a. ☐ Computer Readable Copy
- b. ☐ Paper Copy (identical to computer copy)
- c. ☐ Statement verifying identify of above copies

14. **If a CONTINUING APPLICATION**, check appropriate box, and supply the requisite information below and in a preliminary amendment:

☒ Continuation ☐ Divisional ☐ Continuation-in-part (CIP)

Prior application information:

Serial No.: 09/396,594

Filing Date: 09/15/99

Examiner: _____

Group/Art Unit: 3635

For CONTINUATION or DIVISIONAL APPS only: The entire disclosure of the prior application, from which an oath or declaration is supplied under Box 4b, is considered a part of the disclosure of the accompanying continuation or divisional application and is hereby incorporated by reference. The incorporation can only be relied upon when a portion has been inadvertently omitted from the submitted application parts.

15. Other items enclosed:

16. List of inventors/applicants:

Inventor Daniel M. Jensen Citizenship USA

Address 552 South Gladiola St., Bldg. B, Salt Lake City, UT 84104

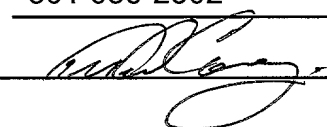
17. **CORRESPONDENCE ADDRESS**

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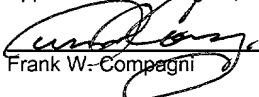
City Salt Lake City State Utah Zip 84121 Country USA

Telephone 801 685-2302 Facsimile 801 685-2303

Signature  Date 14 September 2000

CERTIFICATE OF DEPOSIT UNDER 37 C.F.R. § 1.10

I hereby certify that the items listed above in this transmittal sheet are being deposited with the United States Postal Service "Express Mail Post Office to Addressee" service under 37 C.F.R. § 1.10 on the date indicated below and is addressed to: Assistant Commissioner for Patents, Box Patent Application, Washington, D.C. 20231.


Frank W. Compagni

14 September 2000
Date

Express Mail No.: EL593619818US

**STATEMENT CLAIMING SMALL ENTITY STATUS
(37 CFR 1.9(f) & 1.27(c))--SMALL BUSINESS CONCERN**

Docket Number (Optional)
0818.ACB.PT

Applicant, Patentee, or Identifier: Jensen

Application or Patent No.: _____

Filed or Issued: _____

Title: Apparatus for Forming Lightweight Concrete Block

I hereby state that I am

- ☐ the owner of the small business concern identified below:
☒ an official of the small business concern empowered to act on behalf of the concern identified below:

NAME OF SMALL BUSINESS CONCERN AIR CRETE BLOCK, INC.

ADDRESS OF SMALL BUSINESS CONCERN 552 S. Gladiola St., Bldg. B, Salt Lake City, Utah 84104

I hereby state that the above identified small business concern qualifies as a small business concern as defined in 13 CFR Part 121 for purposes of paying reduced fees to the United States Patent and Trademark Office. Questions related to size standards for a small business concern may be directed to: Small Business Administration, Size Standards Staff, 409 Third Street, SW, Washington, DC 20416.

I hereby state that rights under contract or law have been conveyed to and remain with the small business concern identified above with regard to the invention described in:

- ☒ the specification filed herewith with title as listed above.
☐ the application identified above.
☐ the patent identified above.

If the rights held by the above identified small business concern are not exclusive, each individual, concern, or organization having rights in the invention must file separate statements as to their status as small entities, and no rights to the invention are held by any person, other than the inventor, who would not qualify as an independent inventor under 37 CFR 1.9(c) if that person made the invention or by any concern which would not qualify as a small business concern under 37 CFR 1.9(d), or a nonprofit organization under 37 CFR 1.9(e).

Each person, concern or organization having any rights in the invention is listed below:

- ☒ no such person, concern, or organization exists.
☐ each such person, concern, or organization is listed below.

Separate statements are required from each named person, concern or organization having rights to the invention stating their status as small entities. (37 CFR 1.27)

I acknowledge the duty to file, in this application or patent, notification of any change in status resulting in loss of entitlement to small entity status prior to paying, or at the time of paying, the earliest of the issue fee or any maintenance fee due after the date on which status as a small entity is no longer appropriate. (37 CFR 1.28(b))

NAME OF PERSON SIGNING Daniel M. Jensen

TITLE OF PERSON IF OTHER THAN OWNER President

ADDRESS OF PERSON SIGNING 552 South Gladiola Street, Bldg. B, Salt Lake City, Utah 84104


SIGNATURE  DATE 9-14-99

IN THE UNITED STATES PATENT AND TRADEMARK OFFICE

APPLICANT: Daniel M. Jensen
SERIAL NO.:
FILED:
FOR: APPARATUS FOR FORMING
LIGHTWEIGHT CONCRETE
BLOCK
ART UNIT: N/A
EXAMINER: N/A
DOCKET NO.: 0818.ACB.PT

CERTIFICATE OF DEPOSIT
UNDER 37 C.F.R. § 1.8

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Washington, D.C. 20231.


FRANK W. COMPAGNI

14 September 2000
Date of Deposit

PRELIMINARY AMENDMENT

Assistant Commissioner for Patents
Washington, D.C. 20231

Sir:

Pursuant to the filing of the above-referenced continuation application and before the first Office Action, the Applicant submits the following preliminary amendment and requests that the Examiner enter this preliminary amendment before examination.

In the Specification:

Please amend the title of the invention to - - APPARATUS FOR FORMING
LIGHTWEIGHT CONCRETE BLOCK - -.

On page 2 line 4, insert - - This is a continuation of U.S. Application Serial No.
09/396,594, currently pending. - -

In the Claims:

Please cancel Claims 1-46 without prejudice and add new claims 47-71 as follows:

47. (added) An apparatus for forming lightweight concrete building units, comprising:
at least one mold configured for receiving a batch of a lightweight cement slurry therein and for forming at least one building unit;
an ingredient measuring apparatus configured for measuring each of a plurality of ingredients to form the batch;
a cement slurry mixing apparatus configured for receiving the plurality of ingredients from the ingredient measuring apparatus, for mixing the plurality of ingredients into the batch, and for pouring the batch into said at least one mold; and
a slurry delivery apparatus configured for transporting said cement slurry mixing apparatus to a position proximate said at least one mold so that the batch slurry can be delivered from said cement slurry mixing apparatus to said at least one mold.
48. (added) The apparatus of claim 47, wherein said mold is configured for compressing the batch contained therein when said batch is in slurry form.
49. (added) The apparatus of claim 48, wherein said mold is configured for compressing the batch to form at least one building unit having relatively precise dimensions.
50. (added) The apparatus of claim 48, wherein said mold further includes means for heating said mold to increase the rate of cure of the batch of cement slurry contained therein.
51. (added) The apparatus of claim 47, wherein said ingredient measuring apparatus further comprises a plurality of hoppers for receiving a plurality of separate dry ingredients.
52. (added) The apparatus of claim 51, wherein each of said plurality of hoppers further comprises a plurality of discharge control mechanisms proximate a bottom of each of said plurality of hoppers for selectively controlling the discharge of the separate dry ingredients from each of said plurality of hoppers.

53. (added) The apparatus of claim 52, wherein each of said discharge control mechanism comprises a plate slidably engaged with an opening in the bottom of each of said plurality of hoppers and an actuator coupled that can be extended and retracted coupled to said plate to slide said plate relative to said opening to selectively open, partially open and close said opening.

54. (added) The apparatus of claim 52, further including a weighing hopper comprising an electronic scale for receiving the separate dry ingredients from each of said plurality of hoppers and weighing each of the plurality separate dry ingredients until a desired weight is reached.

55. (added) The apparatus of claim 47, wherein said cement slurry mixing device comprises a vessel rotatably mounted proximate a longitudinal axis thereof to a support frame and including a first drive motor coupled thereto for rotating said vessel to dump a batch contained therein and a second drive motor coupled to said vessel for rotating mixing paddles within said vessel and mixing the batch contained therein.

56. (added) The apparatus of claim 55, wherein said cement slurry mixing device further includes an elongate spout which extends along a substantial length of said vessel for dispensing the batch when the vessel is rotated with said first motor.

57. (added) The apparatus of claim 56, wherein said spout is attached to said vessel proximate to and around a perimeter of an opening formed therein and wherein said spout is tangentially offset relative to the vessel.

58. (added) The apparatus of claim 47, wherein said slurry delivery apparatus comprises an overhead truss and a motor driven wheel/track assembly, said cement slurry mixing device being attached to said overhead truss, said overhead truss movable by said motor driven wheel/track assembly for moving said truss and positioning said mixing device in alignment with said at least one mold.

59. (added) The apparatus of claim 47, further including a computer for controlling the operation of each of said at least one mold, said ingredient measuring apparatus, said cement slurry mixing apparatus, and said slurry delivery apparatus.

60. (added) The apparatus of claim 51, further comprising a foam generator for generating a foam and including a line that exits between openings of said plurality of hoppers of said ingredient measuring apparatus for dispensing the foam into the cement slurry mixing apparatus.

61. (added) The apparatus of claim 50, wherein said means for heating comprises a hot water source for supplying heated water to said mold for circulation there through and for supplying heated water to the cement slurry mixture for each batch thereof.

62. (added) An apparatus for forming lightweight concrete building units, comprising:
a plurality of molds, each configured for receiving a batch of an aerated cement slurry therein and forming a plurality of building units from each batch;
an automated ingredient measuring apparatus configured for weighing each of a plurality of dry ingredients to form a batch;
a foam generator for feeding a metered amount of foam for each batch;
a water source for supplying a metered amount of water for each batch;
a vessel positionable beneath said measuring apparatus configured for receiving the plurality of dry ingredients from the automated ingredient measuring apparatus, the foam from said foam generator and the water from said water source, said vessel having mixing paddles therein for mixing the plurality of dry ingredients, the foam and the water into a batch of lightweight cement slurry; and
a slurry delivery apparatus associated with said vessel capable of delivering a batch of lightweight cement slurry to each of said plurality of molds.

63. (added) The apparatus of claim 62, wherein said plurality of molds are arranged in at least one row, said vessel being movable from beneath said measuring apparatus to a desired mold in said row for delivery of a batch.

64. (added) The apparatus of claim 62, wherein each of said plurality of molds is configured for compressing a batch contained therein when the batch is in slurry form.

65. (added) The apparatus of claim 65, wherein each of said plurality of molds is configured for compressing the batch to form building units having relatively precise dimensions.

66. (added) The apparatus of claim 66, wherein each of said plurality of molds further includes means for heating said mold to a temperature that causes the foam to collapse in a layer of the batch that contacts the mold to form an outer, more dense layer of concrete in each building unit.

67. (added) The apparatus of claim 62, wherein said ingredient measuring apparatus further comprises a plurality of hoppers, each for receiving a separate dry ingredient and each including a discharge control mechanism for selectively controlling the discharge of the dry ingredient from each.

68. (added) The apparatus of claim 67, further including an electronic scale for receiving the separate dry ingredients from each of said plurality of hoppers and weighing each of the plurality separate dry ingredients until a desired weight is reached for each.

69. (added) The apparatus of claim 62, wherein said vessel is rotatably mounted proximate a longitudinal axis thereof to a support frame and includes a first drive motor coupled thereto for rotating said vessel to dump a batch contained therein and a second drive motor coupled to said vessel for rotating said mixing paddles.

70. (added) The apparatus of claim 62, wherein said vessel further includes an elongate spout extending along a substantial length of said vessel for dispensing a batch when the vessel is rotated with said first motor, said spout being tangentially offset relative to said vessel.

71. (added) The apparatus of claim 62, further including a computer for controlling the operation of each of plurality of molds, said ingredient measuring apparatus, said foam generator, said water source, said vessel, and said slurry delivery apparatus.

[illegible]

REMARKS

The Applicant respectfully submits the foregoing amendments to the claims for entry and consideration prior to the first Office Action on the merits. Please cancel Claims 1-46 and add new Claims 47-71. The intent of the applicant is not to surrender any of the subject matter contained in the canceled claims which is being pursued in a copending application.

CONCLUSION

Should the Examiner determine that additional adverse action is necessary on the application, it is respectfully requested that he contact Frank W. Compagni at (801) 685-2302 so that such matters may be resolved as expeditiously as possible.

Respectfully Submitted,
MORRIS, BATEMAN, O'BRYANT & COMPAGNI



Frank W. Compagni
Reg. No. 40,567

United States Patent Application

for

METHOD AND APPARATUS FOR FORMING
LIGHTWEIGHT CONCRETE BLOCK

TO THE COMMISSIONER OF PATENTS AND TRADEMARKS:

Your petitioner, Daniel M. Jensen, citizen of the United States, having a post office address of 552 South Gladiola Street, Bldg. B, Salt Lake City, Utah 84104, prays that letters patent may be granted to him as the inventor of a METHOD AND APPARATUS FOR FORMING LIGHTWEIGHT CONCRETE BLOCK as set forth in the following specification.

METHOD AND APPARATUS FOR FORMING
LIGHTWEIGHT CONCRETE BLOCK

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

5 1. The Field of the Invention

This invention relates generally to lightweight concrete block and a method and apparatus for making lightweight concrete block, and more particularly to a method and apparatus for making lightweight concrete blocks that are capable of being dry stacked and have an impact resistant outer surface.

2. Background

The use of lightweight concrete for building construction has been known for decades. Aerated, lightweight concrete has many desirable properties for use in the building construction industry. For example, it is typically easier to handle because of its decreased weight compared to conventional concrete structures. Furthermore, aerated lightweight concrete often has an "R value" or insulative properties that eliminate or substantially decrease the need for additional insulation. Aerated lightweight concrete is also fire resistant so that any

buildings built with such materials are less likely to be destroyed by fire.

Aerated, lightweight concrete is typically formed by one of two methods. One method involves mixing cement with an aerated foaming agent to form a cementitious slurry having air cells entrained therein. For example, as disclosed in U.S. Patent 3,062,669 to Dilnot, a lightweight concrete is formed by combining Portland cement, ground silica, fibers, sodium silicate, water and a stable, preformed foam prepared by incorporating air into a hydrolyzed protein foaming agent. Similarly, in U.S. Patent 3,867,159 to Ergene, cellular concrete structures are made by mixing water, cement, and a foam into a foamed cementitious slurry which is then cast in a mold and cured.

Another method includes adding alumina powder to the cement mixture. The alumina powder reacts with the cement mixture to form gas bubbles which cause aeration of the cement mixture. In order to form individual blocks of the lightweight concrete, the aerated cement mixture is often poured into a mold and allowed to harden around the air cells to form an aerated, lightweight concrete block.

Several approaches in the art have been employed to form aerated, lightweight concrete building units that are suitable for building purposes. In order for the lightweight concrete building units to be suitable for building purposes, they must have sufficient structural integrity, e.g., compressive strength, to meet building code requirements and they should be uniform in size and shape to be practical for use in the construction industry. In addition, the building units must be manufacturable in an efficient enough manner and in sufficient quantities to support demands required by the building construction industry. As such, one method known in the art of producing individual blocks is to form larger blocks of lightweight concrete and then cut the larger blocks into smaller building units while the cement is still in a partially cured or "green" state.

When employing cutting methods to form smaller building units, whether the initial larger block is formed by using alumina powder to cause the cement mixture to "rise" or the initial block is formed by forming a foamed cement slurry by adding a stable foam to the mixture, the resultant cement slurry is poured into a large mold and allowed to at least

partially cure into a relatively large block. For cement slurries that "rise," the height of the block within the mold is dependent upon the amount of aeration or gas generation that occurs within the cement mixture and the amount of gas that is entrained within the cement mixture when the mixture begins to harden. For cement slurries to which a stable foam has been added prior to being poured into a mold, the height of the block in the mold is determined by the amount of prefoamed cement slurry poured into the mold and the amount of air that escapes from the cement slurry before the viscosity of the cement slurry increases to a point where the air cells can no longer migrate within the mixture. Once the cement has hardened or cured to a degree where the formed block can be handled, the block may be removed from the mold and cut into smaller blocks of a desired size and shape. Because the height of the initially formed block is somewhat unpredictable, there is often significant amounts of scrap material produced during such block forming processes. That is, it is often the case that at least a top layer of the initially formed block is wasted. Examples of cutting apparatuses for cutting larger blocks into smaller building units are

described in U.S. Patents 4,174,936 to Goransson and U.S. Patent 4,528,883 to Goransson et al.

When casting aerated cement compositions, it is common to find that the density of the block formed varies from top to bottom. That is, prior to solidification of the cement slurry, the gas cells migrate to the top of the block resulting in a block that has a greater density nearer the bottom of the block. Accordingly, individual building units that are cut from a larger block will vary in density resulting in blocks of varying structural strength and weight. In order to compensate for the varying density in individual building units, the density of the entire composition of the aerated slurry must be increased so that the least dense building units have sufficient structural integrity.

In processes where the individual building units are cut from a larger block, a mortar or some other binding agent must be employed in order to use the building units for construction purposes. In addition, because each building unit has an outer surface that is comprised of open cells, water is easily absorbed into the building units. As such, the surface of the individual building units must

typically be treated with a water repellant material to prevent water from absorbing into the block. This is especially important in colder climates where absorption of water can cause the building units to fracture as the water therein expands during solidification. Because of this known phenomenon, such building materials are often required to pass a "freeze/thaw test." In the freeze/thaw test, the material is submersed in water for an extended period of time and then frozen. If the material cracks, crumbles, or is otherwise structurally compromised, the material will not be approved for use in construction.

Other methods for forming individual building units include individual casting in a mold. For example, as shown in U.S. Patent 5,522,685 to John, the building units are each formed by pouring lightweight cement slurry into a mold to form a cast body and then combining pairs of cast bodies into individual building units. In U.S. Patent 4,372,092 to Lopez, modular panels are individually formed by pouring a cement slurry into a single panel mold having desired components incorporated therein. Such methods for forming individual building units are typically not very efficient at producing large quantities of building units in a

relatively short period of time. As such, the cost per unit is relatively high compared to conventional construction materials resulting in products that have not been very commercially successful.

5 One approach in the art to overcome the foregoing disadvantages with prior art systems is disclosed in U.S. Patents 5,457,926 and 5,775,047 to Jensen, the inventor of the present invention, each of which are herein incorporated by this reference. In both references, a lightweight
10 interlocking building block is disclosed in which the blocks may be stacked without the use of mortar. U.S. Patent 5,775,047 teaches that the size of the bubbles entrained in the slurry produce a block having desired compressive and shear strengths. Neither reference, however, describes the
15 method or apparatuses for forming such blocks. Furthermore, there is no teaching of the method or apparatus by which such blocks can be formed in a uniform manner to produce building units having substantially equal dimensions and relatively equivalent densities.

20 As such it would be advantageous to provide a method and apparatus for forming individual building units in an efficient and cost effective manner.

It would also be advantageous to provide a method and apparatus for forming individual building units having substantially uniform dimensions and relatively consistent densities for each building unit produced.

5 It would be a further advantage to provide a method and apparatus for forming individual building units in which the building units can be dry stacked without the need for mortar.

10 It would still be a further advantage to provide a method and apparatus for forming individual building units in which the building units have an impact resistant outer surface.

15 It would be yet another advantage to provide a method and apparatus for forming individual building units in which the density of the building units can be altered while maintaining the dimensions of the building units.

20 It would be another advantage to provide a method and apparatus for forming individual building units in which the density of the building units is relatively low while maintaining structural integrity sufficient to meet or exceed building requirements.

It would also be advantageous to provide a method and apparatus for forming individual building units in which the system for forming such building units is fully automated.

5

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

Accordingly, a method and apparatus for forming individual building units is provided, generally comprising an ingredient measuring apparatus, an automated cement slurry mixing apparatus, an automated cement slurry delivery apparatus, and at least one mold. The slurry is preferably comprised of cement, sand, water and foam. In a preferred embodiment, fibers are also added to the slurry to increase the structural integrity of the building units. Various aspects of the invention include the ability to control the amount of cementitious slurry in each batch in order to control to the extent possible the quantity of cementitious slurry poured into each mold and thus the density of the resulting building units and the ability to precisely control the dimensions of each building unit produced.

20

In a preferred embodiment of the present invention, an automated process for forming lightweight concrete building units is provided. The method includes providing a

plurality of molds that are preferably laid out in rows and positioned on either side of a weighing and mixing device. Similarly, the molds may be placed on a turntable and sequentially positioned beneath the mixing device to receive
5 batches of cementitious slurry. Each mold is preferably capable of simultaneously forming a plurality of building units.

Preferably, batches of cementitious slurry are individually mixed in order to control the properties, such
10 as the density, of each building unit formed. To create a first single batch of cementitious slurry, the ingredients are individually measured and combined into a mixing device. The ingredients are then mixed for a period of time until a cementitious slurry is adequately formed. While the
15 ingredients are being mixed, the resulting cementitious slurry is being conveyed or transported to one of the molds. In addition, while the first batch is mixing, a second batch of ingredients is being weighed in order to be dispensed into the mixing device after the first batch is dispensed
20 from the mixing device.

Upon mixing of the second batch, the second batch is transported and poured into another mold while a third batch

of ingredients is being measured for dispensing into the mixing device and for mixing to form a third batch of cementitious slurry. Additional batches are mixed, transported, and poured into additional molds until the first batch has cured to at least a point where the building units within the mold can be handled.

In another preferred embodiment, while the first batch is being transported and poured into one mold, a second batch of ingredients is being dispensed into the mixing device and mixed to form a second batch of a cementitious slurry.

After the building units have cured to a state where the building units are rigid enough to be handled, the building units are removed from their respective molds and transported to a storage area. This process is preferably continuously repeated so that as building units are removed from their respective mold, the mold is prepared, as by rinsing and/or applying a release agent (e.g., oil), for receiving another batch of cementitious slurry. As such the present invention provides a process where there is relatively little time when a particular mold in the process does not contain a batch of cement, except of course when

the process is first started and all of the molds are initially empty.

In a preferred embodiment, the number of molds is dependent upon the process time. Preferably, however, the number of molds is approximately equal to the time between the start of a mix cycle for a batch of cementitious slurry and when the building units resulting from the batch are removed from their respective mold, divided by the time it takes to mix each batch and pour each batch into an individual mold. Such a process is highly advantageous as it maximizes the usage of each mold and maximizes the efficiency of the process.

In another preferred embodiment, the ingredients are measured by weight in which a first dry ingredient is poured onto a scale and weighed to approximately a first weight. A second dry ingredient is then added to the scale and weighed to a second weight. Additional ingredients as desired may be weighed and added to the mixture in a similar manner. The dry ingredients are then poured into a mixer to which metered amounts of foam and water are added in sufficient quantities to form a cementitious slurry having desired characteristics. Preferably, the amount of water and foam

are metered by injecting these liquid ingredients for predetermined timed periods. By knowing the rate of flow (i.e., flow volume per unit time) for such liquid ingredients, relatively precise amounts can be metered into the mixture. In a preferred embodiment, the water is added to the mixing device prior to the addition of any dry ingredients in order to rinse the inside of the mixing device between batches.

One of the difficulties known in the art has been the inability to form batches of cementitious slurry with relatively consistent characteristics (i.e., density, even dispersion of aeration, quantities of ingredients, etc.) The present invention, however, solves these problems by using weighted amounts of dry ingredients and metered amounts of liquid ingredients to obtain relatively consistent quantities of ingredients in each batch. For controlling the quantities of the dry ingredients, which quantities typically have a greater affect on the characteristics of the finished product, each ingredient is metered at a first rate to approximately 90 percent of the desired weight (e.g., 90 percent). Each ingredient is then metered at a second slower rate to the desired weight. As

such, the quantity of each ingredient can be more precisely controlled by adding the last amount of each ingredient at a slower rate without significantly decreasing the overall time it takes for each ingredient to be properly measured.

5 In a preferred embodiment, in order to further reduce the number of molds required while maximizing usage of the mixing device, the temperature of the cementitious slurry is kept at an elevated temperature of preferably about 80-120 degrees Fahrenheit. This temperature range is dependent
10 upon the characteristics of the foaming agent selected. Specifically, foaming agents typically have a critical temperature above which the foaming agent will fail to produce a foam. In addition, there is typically a critical range of temperatures below the critical temperature at
15 which the foaming agent will foam to some extent. For example, at a lower end of this critical temperature range, the foaming agent will foam quite well, while at a temperature nearer but less than the critical temperature the ability of the foaming agent to foam is reduced.
20 Preferably, the foamed cementitious slurry is mixed at a temperature at or near the lower end of the critical temperature range to maximize foaming efficiency.

There is also often a second critical temperature of the foaming agent in slurry above which the foam will quickly destabilize (i.e., collapse). Often, but not necessarily, this second critical temperature is at or near the first critical temperature. Because, however, the foam will be mixed with the cementitious slurry, the slurry itself affects the temperature at which the foam will destabilize. In order to locally destabilize the foam at the interface between the mold and the slurry to create an outer hardened shell around each building unit produced, the mold is preferably heated above this second critical temperature or at least above the first critical temperature to obtain a desired shell thickness in the block. Knowing the temperature sensitive characteristics of the foaming agent (both alone and when mixed with a cement slurry) allows the other process parameters to be set to maximize the foaming efficiency of the foaming agent while encouraging quicker curing of the cement slurry and formation of an outer shell by the addition of heat. Those skilled in the art, will appreciate that the temperature may be kept at other temperatures depending upon the temperature

sensitivity of the characteristics of the ingredients and the desired cure time.

Preferably, the temperature of the process is increased or decreased depending on the characteristics of the foaming agent used and the temperature at which the foam will maintain its air cells without significant breakdown.

Heating of the cementitious slurry is desirable to decrease the cure time for each batch since the rate of cure for

conventional cement products is typically proportional to the temperature. An objective of the present invention is to maximize the cure rate by maintaining the slurry at a temperature that is as near as possible to the critical temperature of the foam without compromising the stability of the foam. However, those skilled in the art will

appreciate that lower temperatures may be employed in accordance with the present invention even though such lower slurry temperatures result in slower cure rates and may allow additional migration and coalescing of air cells during the curing process. Likewise, higher temperatures may be employed if a proper foaming agent is selected that can withstand higher temperatures.

In a preferred embodiment, a foaming agent is selected that has a critical temperature of approximately 110 to 120 degrees Fahrenheit (i.e., the temperature at which the resulting foam breaks down and its air cells collapse). The water that is added to the mixture is preferably heated to approximately 100 degrees Fahrenheit so that the stability of the foam is not compromised. When mixed with the dry ingredients (e.g., cement and sand), the mixture equalizes to approximately 80-90 degrees Fahrenheit. Finally, the mold is heated to approximately 170-220 degrees Fahrenheit. This temperature is preferred as it sufficiently collapses the air cells without substantially affecting the integrity of the cement. However, the higher the temperature of the mold, the thicker the dense outer layer of the building unit becomes. As such, the foaming agent remains stable during the mixing process as the heated slurry is below the critical temperature of the foam. As the cementitious slurry is poured into the mold, the air cells in the slurry that contact the surface of the heated mold collapse producing an outer layer of cement with fewer air cells. The use of a heated cementitious slurry in conjunction with the aid of the heated mold quickly cures the slurry such

that the entrained air cells are prevented from coalescing, interconnecting, or migrating. Thus, the air cells remain evenly dispersed throughout the slurry. The hardened outer shell produced by the heated mold produces a dense outer
5 layer that reduces the ability of the cement to draw in water by capillary action.

Preferably, in accordance with the method of the present invention, the batch of cementitious slurry is mixed as it is transported to a mold, such that the mixing time
10 does not significantly delay the process. As such, the mixing device itself is transported to a mold while mixing is in progress and the slurry is poured into the mold upon arrival at the mold. Mixing the cementitious slurry while it is being transported to the mold keeps the cementitious
15 slurry workable to prevent the slurry from setting during transport. After dispensing the slurry into a mold, the mixing device returns to the ingredient metering apparatus to receive a new batch of ingredients for mixing. The present invention thus utilizes mixing time during transport
20 and allows each batch to be mixed for substantially the same amount of time for each mold. Maintaining consistent mixing

times while keeping the transport time relatively short,
allows each batch to cure an equal amount in each mold.

In a preferred embodiment, the first batch is
transported at a first speed to within a relatively short
5 distance of the first mold and then transported at a second
slower speed to a substantially precise position relative to
the first mold. As such, the position of the mixing device
can be relatively precisely controlled while increasing the
speed of the overall transporting operation. This
10 transporting operation is repeated for each of the other
molds.

Preferably, the cementitious slurry is comprised of
sand, cement and water. In yet another preferred
embodiment, fibers are added to the slurry to add structural
15 integrity to the finished building units. In still another
preferred embodiment, an additional cement is added to the
mixture wherein the additional cement is a quick setting
cement that decreases the curing time of each building unit.
Utilizing such a dual cement mixture creates a cementitious
20 composition that has the structural properties and cost
savings of longer setting cement while taking advantage of
the decrease in curing time resulting from the addition of

the quicker setting cement. Decreasing the curing time of the cementitious slurry decreases the number of molds required for the process in accordance with the present invention in which molds are systematically and continuously
5 filled while slurry batches in other molds are curing.

After the individual building units have cured to a point where they can be safely handled, if necessary, the building units are transported to a hydration station where water is applied to the building units in order to properly
10 hydrate the cement. Of course, the cement may already contain enough water for proper hydration without requiring additional water. In addition, it is also contemplated in accordance with the present invention that the building units may be placed in an autoclave to aid the curing
15 process.

In yet another preferred embodiment of the present invention, the aerated cementitious slurry is compressed while inside the mold. More specifically, the slurry is compressed a relatively precise amount to form an individual
20 building unit having substantially precise dimensions. As such, each building unit produced will have precisely the same dimensions. Indeed, building units manufactured in

accordance with the present invention are capable of having a tolerance of +/- .03 inches. Maintaining control over the dimensions of the finished building units allows the building units to be dry stacked without resulting in appreciable variations in wall height as the building units are stacked. That is, using building units of substantially equal dimensions to build a structure results in walls that do not substantially vary in height along their length.

Controlling the dimension of each building unit produced is preferably accomplished by compressing the aerated cementitious slurry within the mold in at least one direction such that a precise internal volume within the mold is achieved to form lightweight concrete building units having substantially precise volumes and dimensions when cured. In addition, by metering the ingredients in such a relatively precise manner as herein disclosed, the density of each block will be substantially uniform for each block.

Compressing the cementitious slurry also causes air cells proximate outer surfaces of the lightweight building unit to collapse resulting in a lightweight building unit having an impact resistant outer surface or shell when cured. The use of compression techniques in accordance with

the principles of the present invention may also be employed to imprint a texture or pattern on at least one outer surface of the lightweight building unit.

In this process it is also beneficial to cause the
5 cementitious slurry to cure to a handleable point as quickly as possible in order to maintain the aeration that is entrained within the cementitious slurry in the cured building unit. One way of decreasing the cure time of the cementitious slurry is to heat the water that is added to
10 the mixture (e.g., to a temperature at or near 140 degrees Fahrenheit). In addition, heating the molds (e.g., to a temperature at or above approximately 180 degrees Fahrenheit) also speeds the cure time of each building unit. In fact, building units manufactured in accordance with the
15 principles of the present invention can cure to a handleable state in approximately ten (10) minutes or less. It is preferable that the molds be heated by circulating heated water through the molds. In a preferred embodiment, the heated water that is added to the cementitious slurry and
20 the water utilized to heat the molds is supplied from a common source.

In still another preferred embodiment, the foaming agent utilized to aerate the cementitious slurry has a first critical temperature of approximately 100 degrees Fahrenheit (i.e., the temperature above which the foaming agent will not produce a stable foam). The foaming agent is heated to about 80 degrees Fahrenheit, agitated into a foam, and added to the cementitious slurry for mixing therein. In a preferred embodiment, the heated water added to the foaming agent is from the same source of heated water that supplies water to the mix for forming each batch of cementitious slurry so long as the temperature of the water is not above the first critical temperature of the foaming agent. The mold is preferably heated above a second critical temperature of the foaming agent (i.e., the critical temperature of the foam itself or the temperature at which the foam destabilizes).

Other objects and advantages of the present invention will become apparent upon reading the following detailed description and appended claims, and upon reference to the accompanying drawings.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

FIG. 1 is a schematic block flow diagram illustrating a first preferred embodiment of a process for forming lightweight concrete building units in accordance with the principles of the present invention;

FIG. 2 is a schematic block flow diagram illustrating a preferred embodiment of a process for measuring ingredients for forming lightweight concrete building units in accordance with the principles of the present invention;

FIG. 3 is a schematic block flow diagram illustrating a second preferred embodiment of a process for forming lightweight concrete building units in accordance with the principles of the present invention;

FIG. 4 is a schematic block flow diagram illustrating a preferred embodiment of a process for transporting mixed slurry to a mold in accordance with the principles of the present invention;

FIG. 5 is a partial cross-sectional view of a lightweight building unit manufactured in accordance with the principles of the present invention;

FIG. 6 is a partial cross-sectional view of cementitious slurry being compressed within a mold in accordance with the principles of the present invention;

FIG. 7 is a perspective top view of a lightweight
5 building unit manufactured in accordance with principles of the present invention;

FIG. 8 is a top view of the building unit illustrated in FIG. 7;

FIG. 9 is a bottom view of the building unit
10 illustrated in FIG. 7;

FIG. 10 is a perspective top view of a wall constructed with building units in accordance with the principles of the present invention;

FIG. 11 is a perspective top view of a U-shaped
15 building unit in accordance with the principles of the present invention;

FIG. 12 is a top view of the building unit illustrated in FIG. 11;

FIG. 13, is a side view of a mold in accordance with
20 the principles of the present invention;

FIG. 14 is a top view of the lid of the mold illustrated in FIG. 13;

FIG. 15 is a top view of compression plates for the mold illustrated in FIG. 13 in accordance with the principles of the present invention;

FIG. 16 is a top view of mold pillars for the mold illustrated in FIG. 13 in accordance with the principles of the present invention;

FIG. 17 is a top view of the mold illustrated in FIG. 13;

FIG. 18 is a front end view of the mold illustrated in FIG. 13;

FIG. 19 is a side view of the mold illustrated in FIG. 13 in which the lid is in an opened position and the sides of the mold have been removed to show the inside of the mold;

FIG. 20 is a top view of a plurality of panels assembled to form the mold illustrated in FIG. 13 in accordance with the principles of the present invention;

FIG. 21 is a back side view of a mold panel in accordance with the principles of the present invention;

FIG. 22 is a front side view of the mold panel illustrated in FIG. 21;

FIG. 23A is a side view of a mixing device in accordance with the principles of the present invention;

FIG. 23B is an end view of the mixing device illustrated in FIG. 23A;

5 FIG. 24 is a front view of an apparatus for forming lightweight concrete building units in accordance with the principles of the present invention;

10 FIG. 25 is a top view of a hopper discharge control mechanism in accordance with the principles of the present invention; and

FIG. 26 is a front view of the apparatus shown in FIG. 24 with the mixing device positioned over a mold.

15 **DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE PREFERRED EMBODIMENTS
OF THE INVENTION**

Reference is now made to the drawings wherein like parts are designated with like numerals throughout. The present invention is directed to a method for forming
20 lightweight cementitious building units that are amenable to being dry stacked, that is, stacked to form buildings and other structures without the use of mortar or other such compounds. Specifically, with reference to FIG. 1, a block diagram illustrating the process, generally indicated at 10

for manufacturing such lightweight cementitious building units is shown in accordance with the principles of the present invention. As illustrated in FIG. 1, an automated process, generally indicated at 10, for forming lightweight concrete building units comprises the steps of measuring 12 the ingredients necessary for forming a first batch of an aerated lightweight concrete slurry, combining 14 those ingredients in a mixer, mixing 16 the ingredients into a first batch of aerated cementitious slurry, and pouring 20 the ingredients into a mold. While the first batch is mixing 16, the "dry" ingredients (e.g., cement, sand, quick setting cement) sufficient to form a second batch of aerated cementitious slurry are measured 12 and await emptying of the first batch from the mixer. As the first batch is being mixed 16, it is also being delivered (i.e., transported) to the mold such that the mixing time is utilized to transport the batch to a mold. Upon delivery of the first batch to a mold, the mixer is quickly returned to receive the next batch of weighed ingredients. The second batch is then mixed 16 while the dry ingredients for a third batch of slurry are being measured 12. Additional batches are mixed 16 and poured 18 into additional molds until the first batch has

cured to a "green" state (i.e., to at least a point where the resulting building unit(s) can be safely handled). As such, dry ingredients are either measured 12 or being dispensed into the mixer and combined 14 with water and foam. Likewise, the mixer is either being emptied 18 and returned for receiving additional batches of ingredients or is mixing 16 ingredients to form a batch of cementitious slurry and transporting the ingredients to a mold.

Once the first batch of cementitious slurry is cured 20 to a point where the resulting building unit(s) can be safely handled, the process further includes removing 22 the building unit(s) from the first mold, applying 24 a release agent to the mold and repeating the process for that mold. As illustrated in FIG. 1, the process is divided into three main stages including dry ingredient measuring 26, mixing 28, and curing in mold 30. Each of these stages 26, 28 and 30 are repeated as quickly as possible. That is, while the mixing stage 28 is occurring for one batch of materials, the measuring and curing in mold stages 26 and 30, respectively, are being performed for other batches of materials. As such, usage of each of the physical structures to perform the process is efficiently maximized. Further, because the

contemplated that more than one mixing device may be employed for simultaneously mixing of multiple batches.

Referring now to FIG. 2, the method or process for measuring ingredients, generally indicated at 12, is

5 comprised of several steps for substantially controlling the amount of each ingredient in each batch. Because the densities of most dry materials are relatively consistent, the quantity or volume of a material can be generally determined from the weight. The present process utilizes
10 ingredient weights in a novel manner to meter the quantity of each ingredient in each batch. The first step involves selecting 32 the first ingredient to be added to the mixture that will form the desired cementitious slurry. The first ingredient is then dispensed 34 at a first rate onto a
15 scale. It should be noted that the term "scale" refers to any device that is capable of receiving a material and determining its weight. The first ingredient is weighed 36 as the ingredient is dispensed 34. When the weight of the ingredient has reached 38 an amount proximate to but not in
20 excess of the desired weight, for example 90% of the desired weight, the rate of dispensing 40 is decreased to a second slower rate so that the scale can more accurately respond to

increased weight. The ingredient is further dispensed at this second slower rate while being weighed 42 until the weight has reached 44 approximately 100% of the desired weight. By using such a method, ingredients can be

5 dispensed in more accurate quantities without significantly decreasing overall dispensing time. In the alternative, weighing ingredients while being dispensed at a single rate must either be dispensed at a slower rate to allow the scale to accurately measure changes in weight or likely result in
10 inaccurately measured quantities if the rate of dispensing is too high. That is, it is difficult to control the quantity of ingredients resulting from dispensing at a single fast rate and then abruptly stopping the dispensing process when the desired weight is measured.

15 When the weight of the dispensed ingredient reaches 44 approximately 100% of the desired weight, dispensing is stopped 46 and it is determined 48 whether other ingredients are needed for the present batch. If not, no additional ingredients are dispensed for the batch. If so, the next
20 ingredient is selected 50 and the measuring process 12 is repeated for the next ingredient. Multiple ingredients can be measured in this manner as the weight of the next

ingredient is determined by calculating the weight added to the previously measured ingredients. This process is typically employed for measuring "dry" ingredients but may also be utilized for water, foaming agent and other liquid ingredients.

Preferably, a metered amount of water is added to the mixer before any of the dry ingredients so that the mixer can be activated with the water present to rinse the inside of the mixer between batches. The amount of water and foaming agent added to each batch are preferably measured by dispensing these "wet" ingredients for preselected periods of time. By knowing the size of the orifice through which the wet ingredients pass into the mixer and the pressure at which the wet ingredients are injected, relatively precise amounts of liquid ingredients can be dispensed by controlling the dispensing time.

In order to decrease the cure time of the resulting block (i.e., the time to reach a "green" state where the block is sufficiently rigid to be safely removed from the mold and handled), the process is performed at an elevated temperature. Preferably, this temperature is between 100 and 180 degrees Fahrenheit, which decreases the curing time

of the cementitious slurry without significantly affecting its physical properties. Lower temperatures, even ambient temperatures, may be employed with the present invention, but will increase the overall cure time of the cement.

5 Likewise, higher temperatures up to and exceeding the boiling point of water may also be employed to decrease the cure time. Decreasing the cure time of the cement to a "green" state is important in order to properly capture the entrained air in the cementitious slurry while the entrained
10 air is substantially evenly dispersed throughout the slurry mixture. One problem found in the art is that the density of similar blocks vary within each block or from block to block because the entrained air was allowed to migrate or rise to the top (i.e., the heavier particles settled toward
15 the bottom) before the block sufficiently solidified. In accordance with the present invention, the ability to reach this "green" state before the individual air cells coalesce or migrate maintains the "closed-cell" characteristics of the resulting block and produces building units with
20 consistent densities of materials throughout the building unit. Maintaining the air cells in a closed form is important to give the blocks desired insulative, structural,

and water resistant properties that would not otherwise be achieved if the individual air cells were allowed to join with other adjacent air cells to form larger air cells to any appreciable extent. For example, aerated concrete

5 materials known in the art that are in an open cell form will allow air, heat, and water to travel into and through the material much more rapidly than similar materials having closed cells. A good analogy is to compare the difference between neoprene (a closed cell material) which is use for
10 wet suits and a synthetic sponge (an open cell material). Both are made from similar materials but they perform quite differently.

The resulting blocks manufactured in accordance with the present invention are capable of withstanding a "freeze
15 thaw test." Such tests are often required for certification of building materials for certain applications. The freeze thaw test requires the building material to be submersed in water for a period of time and then placed in a freezing environment for another period of time. If water has been
20 allowed to absorb into the material, the water therein will expand when frozen causing fractures in the material. To date, there are no lightweight concrete products known other

than the block manufactured in accordance with the present invention that can sufficiently pass the freeze thaw test, that have a relatively high volume of air.

Referring now to FIG. 3, the process, generally indicated at 200, in accordance with the present invention is illustrated. In the process 200, it is preferable that cement, sand, water, and foam are utilized to form the desired cementitious slurry. Fibers, additional cements, and other aggregates may also be included in accordance with the principles of the present invention depending on the desired characteristics of the finished product. The "dry" ingredients, such as cement and sand are weighed 202 to a desired weight and dispensed 204 into a mixer. Water and foam, generated by blowing or mixing air into a foaming agent to produce a foam having a consistency similar to shaving cream with larger or smaller air cells as may be desired, are added 206 to the mixture and mixed 210 with the other ingredients for a relatively short period of time (e.g., thirty seconds), sufficient to substantially evenly disperse the foam throughout the mixture. While the ingredients are being mixed 210, the mixer itself is transported 208 to the mold, thus utilizing the mixing time

to convey the slurry to the desired mold. Of course, those skilled in the art will appreciate that a separate transport device may be utilized in which the mixer remains stationary, dispenses a mixed batch into a transport

5 container and allows the transport container to deliver the batch of slurry to the mold. The present embodiment, however, keeps the cementitious slurry workable (i.e., in a liquid state) until it is dispensed into the mold such that the slurry is less likely to begin substantial
10 solidification during the delivery or transport 208 process.

Preferably, the size of air cells within the foam are relatively consistent in size for producing cells within the slurry and core of the resulting block of relatively consistent sizes. The foam is formed from a foaming agent,
15 such as a protein-based, synthetic, or a combination protein-based/synthetic foaming agent known in the art, having properties that will result in a foam that will maintain a stable foam at elevated temperatures.

Additionally, the foaming agent is selected that will break
20 down, when foamed, at a known temperature or approximately a known temperature. To form the cementitious slurry in accordance with the present invention, heated water,

preferably at approximately 100 degrees Fahrenheit is mixed with the dry ingredients. The foaming agent is then added to the mixture at a temperature preferably below about 90 degrees Fahrenheit for a foaming agent that will foam at

5 temperatures up to 100 degrees Fahrenheit. Such a foam preferably has the ability to remain stable (i.e., maintains surface tension of the air cells therein without collapsing) to at least a temperature of 120 degrees Fahrenheit.

As used herein, the surface tension of a bubble in a

10 cementitious slurry at ambient pressure at sea level (the slurry having a selected temperature, a selected composition and components, and having a certain viscosity sufficient to resist migration of the air cells), is the ability of the bubble to resist coalescing and/or collapsing. As is known

15 in the art, there are foaming agents which produce bubbles that are more resistant to collapse and coalescing either in the presence of certain surfactants or when heat, vibration, or other means are applied to the slurry to cause bubbles to collapse or coalesce with other adjacent bubbles to form new

20 larger bubbles. The present invention preferably utilizes a temperature sensitive foaming agent that results in a foam whose bubbles have relatively high surface tension and thus

remain stable and are less likely to coalesce or collapse,
unless subjected to temperatures above the critical
temperature of the foam (i.e., the temperature at which the
foam breaks down). Those skilled in the art, however, will
5 appreciate that various aspects of the present invention may
be practiced with other types of aerated or lightweight
slurries that may be formed by insitu chemical reaction or
by adding lightweight aggregate materials, such as
polystyrene pellets, to the mixture.

10 As previously discussed, it is preferable that as the
slurry is being mixed 210, the slurry is simultaneously
being transported 208 to a mold for delivery of the slurry.
The slurry is then dispensed 212 from the mixer into a mold.
Preferably, the heated slurry is poured into a mold that has
15 been heated to an elevated temperature of approximately 180-
220 degrees Fahrenheit. The heat from the mold and the fact
that the slurry itself has been heated by the addition of
heated water and foam hastens hardening of the slurry to
limit the amount of coalescing of adjacent air cells within
20 the slurry and to limit the amount of migration of air cells
and settling of heavier particles to the bottom of the mold
during the curing process. The elevated temperature of the

slurry and mold quickly reduces the viscosity of the slurry to a point below which the air bubbles in the slurry can move or coalesce to form larger bubbles. Indeed, in accordance with the present invention, the heated ingredients
5 utilized to form the cementitious slurry nearly immediately begin to cure much more rapidly. That is, because the slurry is heated by the combination of the dry ingredients with heated water and foam that are each at a temperature of over about at least 80 degrees Fahrenheit, the mixing and de-
10 livery of the slurry to the mold is essentially a race against the curing process. Those skilled in the art, after understanding the principles of the pre-sent invention, will appreciate that other temperatures of components and ingredient ratios may be employed de-pending upon the types of
15 cement and foaming agent used as well as the desired curing time of the slurry into a solid state. For example, by modifying the cement ratios, such as decreasing the quick setting cement or calcium aluminate cement by 25% and adding 25% more standard cement, the cure time would increase by
20 about 10 minutes compared to other embodiments discussed herein. Likewise, reducing the temperature of the water added to the mixture by 25 degrees Fahrenheit, the cure time

would increase by about seven minutes compared to adding water at 140 degrees Fahrenheit.

Heating the mold to a temperature above the critical temperature of the foam produces an outer wall or shell in each block. This shell is produced because the foam breaks down (i.e., the air cells collapse) in the layer adjacent the mold that exceeds the critical temperature of the foam before the slurry in this outer layer cures. One consequence of the heated mold is the formation of larger air cells adjacent the outer layer. The air cells in this region may not reach a hot enough temperature before curing of the cement to break down but may coalesce to form a small layer of larger air cells between the outer layer and the core of the block.

Modifying the temperature of the mold will affect the thickness of the outer wall of each block. For example, fore each 10 degree increase of the mold temperature above 180 degrees Fahrenheit the thickness of the outer wall will increase by about 1/16 inch. Increasing the mold temperature above 180 degrees Fahrenheit to a temperature of 220 degrees, for example, also helps to produce a smoother outer surface on the block. For every decrease of 10

degrees Fahrenheit of the mold temperature, the wall thickness will decrease by about 1/32 inch down to a temperature of about 150 degrees Fahrenheit.

In accordance with the present invention, a mold is
5 utilized to compress 214 the slurry therein to a precise dimension. Preferably, the step of compressing 214 the lightweight slurry is performed to a substantially precise degree, that degree being substantially the same for each block produced. Compressing 214 the slurry is possible in
10 accordance with the present invention, because the slurry is a lightweight slurry preferably filled with air cells that can be forced out of or compressed within the slurry depending on the amount of compression applied. As such, when the slurry is poured into a mold, the mold is capable
15 of squeezing the slurry a precise amount to a specific dimension. This compressing 214 performs at least two functions. First, the compressing 214 causes air cells in an outer layer of the slurry to collapse such that the density of this outer layer increases to produce a
20 relatively hard outer shell in the finished block. Second, the compressing 214 provides a means by which the dimensions of the resulting block can be precisely controlled. That

is, regardless of the quantity of slurry poured into the mold or the beginning density of the slurry prior to being poured into the mold and assuming that the batch of slurry has an adequate amount of air cells entrained therein, the
5 slurry can be compressed to a point where the air entrained within the slurry is removed to allow the desired amount of compression. Accordingly, each produced block will have nearly the same dimensions since each batch of slurry is compressed the same amount regardless of initial density or
10 quantity of each batch of slurry (i.e., the compression is not dependent upon force but rather compressing to a specific dimension wherein a preselected volume within the mold is achieved). As such, each lightweight concrete building unit produced has a substantially precise volume
15 and precise dimensions. Indeed blocks produced in accordance with the principles of the present invention can achieve dimensional tolerances of +/- 0.03 inches or less.

Upon curing of the slurry into a block that is rigid enough to be handled, the blocks are removed 216 from the
20 mold and hydrated 218 with water. That is, when the blocks reach a "green" state, the blocks are removed 216 the mold and transported for hydration 218, if necessary, during

which water is sprayed or otherwise applied to the block.

As is known in the art, this supplemental water facilitates the slow curing of the block and provides adequate water to complete the hydration process. The blocks may then be

5 placed 220 in an autoclave to further aid the curing process of the blocks. The blocks may then be stacked, packaged and allowed to completely cure prior to shipment.

As illustrated in FIG. 4, the process of pouring 18 the mixed slurry into a mold, as shown in FIG. 1, may include
10 the steps of pouring 60 the slurry into a transport container and transporting 62 and 64 the slurry to the mold while a new batch of slurry is being mixed 16 (see FIG. 1). The transport container may agitate the slurry during transport to keep the slurry in a workable state. The
15 transport container then pours 66 the slurry into the mold and returns to the mixer for receiving another batch of slurry for another mold. Use of such a transport allows the mixer to continue to mix additional batches of slurry while other batches are being delivered to a mold. Of course,
20 those skilled in the art will appreciate that multiple transports could be employed in accordance with the present invention. In order to increase the speed of transport,

however, while maintaining precision of movement relative to each mold, the transport container containing a batch of slurry is accelerated to a first rate 62 or speed until the transport nears or is a relatively short distance from the mold. The transport is then decelerated to a second slower rate 64 or speed until the transport is properly positioned over the mold for pouring 66 the slurry into the mold. As such, the transport can move the slurry quickly to each mold without sacrificing precision of position over the mold.

As shown in FIG. 5, a lightweight cement block, generally indicated at 300, having a "closed cell" structure manufactured in accordance with the present invention, has a novel internal structural configuration. More specifically, the block 300 has a relatively smooth, dense, continuous outer surface 302 and a lightweight inner core 304. This outer surface 302 is preferably produced by at least two process parameters. First, the foaming agent contained in the outer surface 302 of the slurry that contacts a heated mold quickly destabilizes causing the air cells to collapse producing a layer of slurry with fewer air cells. Second, compression of the slurry within a mold further causes air cells in an outer layer being compressed to collapse and

forces the air cells out of the slurry. This outer surface or shell 302 gives the block 300 unique characteristics.

Preferably, the relatively smooth outer surface 302 is a result of an outer, dense layer 306 having a width of about

5 1/64 inch to 1 inch, but could be larger or smaller in width depending on process parameters. The outer layer 306 gives the block 300 unique properties including the ability to resist the absorption of water by capillary action to an appreciable extent, as is required by the "freeze thaw"

10 test, impact resistance to external forces that would otherwise damage the block 300, better insulative values (i.e., "R" value). In addition, the structural strength of

the block 300 is dramatically increased since the outer layer 306 creates a hardened outer framework to support the
15 softer, less dense core 304. In fact, the block 300 can

have a core 304 that has a higher volumetric percentage of aeration compared to aerated concrete blocks in the art because the outer layer 306 provides the necessary structural support for the aerated core 304. Thus, the

20 block 300 can be made lighter and use less cement per block than any other block known in the art.

As further illustrated in FIG. 6, in accordance with the present invention, when the slurry, generally indicated at 320, is placed inside a mold, indicated by surfaces 324 and 326, and compressed, as indicated by arrow 322, the surface 326 presses, as indicated by arrow 328, against the bottom 330 of the slurry 320. The slurry 320 is thus "squeezed" or compressed along this axial direction. As a result, air cells are forced from the slurry 320 and layers 332 and 334 of denser material are formed along the top 336 and bottom 330, respectively, of the slurry 320. Typically, these layers 332 and 334 are of approximately equal thickness as a result of the compression. Depending on the density of the slurry 320 during compression, however, the layers 332 and 334 may have different thicknesses. In either case, the resulting block has relatively thick layers 332 and 334 at the surfaces where the block is typically stacked. That is, additional structural rigidity is provided in the block along the surfaces that are employed to stack the block, resulting in blocks and walls formed therefrom that have better structural properties than lightweight concrete blocks known in the art.

Referring again to FIG. 5, the foregoing compression techniques may be employed in accordance with the present invention to produce textures, designs, or other aesthetic textural features 308 and 309 in the outer surface 302 of the block 300. Thus, the slurry can be compressed against the surface 302 to imprint a texture on the surface 302 while the slurry is in the mold.

The unique lightweight concrete building units of the present invention have external features for interlocking adjacent blocks to allow the blocks to be dry stacked without the need for mortar or other binding agents interposed between building units. Such a block is illustrated in FIGS. 7, 8 and 9 in which the block, generally referred to at 110, in accordance with the present invention has a generally rectangular configuration with interlocking or mating features 112, 114, 116, 118, 120, 121, 122, 123, 124, 125 and 126, among others, that provide the ability to stack the blocks 110 in an interlocking arrangement. FIG. 8 is a view of the top of the block 110 showing the various mating features, such as mating features 112 and 114 for interlocking with mating features 116 and 118, respectively of another block 110. These "tongue and

groove" mating features 112, 114, 116 and 118 are preferably substantially vertically aligned relative to the block 110 such that the blocks 110 can be vertically removed, i.e., slid, from a mold during the manufacturing process. The

5 bottom of the block 110, as shown in FIG. 9, also has mating features 140-149 which comprise an inverse impression of the top 120 of the block 110 for mating with features such as mating features 121-126. In addition, the bottom 138 of the block 110 is recessed below the elongate sides 150 and 152
10 to receive the raised top portion 117 of the block 110. The mating features 121-126 and 140-149 are preferably relatively evenly spaced so that when the blocks 110 are stacked, they can be offset or staggered from one another as one of skill in the art would typically build a brick wall.
15 Thus, the mating features 140-149 can receive any of the mating features 121-126 of another block 110.

As is further illustrated in FIGS. 7, 8, and 9, each block 110 is defined by a pair of elongate sides 154 and 156 separated by a plurality of interposing walls 158, 159, 160,
20 161 and 162 with the walls 158 and 162 forming the ends of the block 110. The walls 158-162 define a plurality of transversely extending chambers or cavities 128, 129, 130,

and 131 that significantly reduce the amount of cement required per block 110 compared to a solid block that does not have such cavities. In addition, these cavities provide a means for adding structural strength to a stacked arrangement of the blocks 110.

As shown in FIG. 10, the blocks 110 in accordance with the present invention are stacked in a manner in which the mating features as described with reference to FIGS. 7, 8 and 9 properly align the stacked blocks 110 such that the cavities 128, 129, 130, and 131 align with cavities of other blocks 110 stacked above and below. Rebar 170 or other structural materials may be inserted into the cavities 128, 129, 130, and 131 and the cavities may be filled with non-aerated cement to provide columns 172 of rigid support within the blocks 110.

U-shaped blocks, generally indicated at 180, as illustrated in FIGS. 11 and 12 may also be employed to allow rows 174 of horizontal support preferably comprising non-aerated concrete and rebar 170 (see FIG. 10) to extend through the wall of the structure being built with the block 110 of the present invention. The U-shaped block 180 includes mating or interlocking features 181-185 as well as

other features similar to those found on the block 110 for mating with adjacent blocks above and below the U-shaped block 180. Such features (not shown) are provided on the bottom of the block 180 to mate with blocks 110 as well.

5 The U-shaped block 180 is similar in overall size and shape to the blocks 110, but have side walls 186 and 187 that define a longitudinal channel 188 extending the length of the block 180. Furthermore, the dividing or interposing walls 189-193 are similar in configuration to similar walls
10 found in the block 110 but are of a shorter height to further define the longitudinal channel 188. Preferably, the height of the channel 188 from the top edge 194 of the wall 189 to the top edge 195 of the wall 187 is approximately equal to the width W of one of the vertical
15 chambers 196.

The building units as described are preferably formed in a mold, generally indicated at 400, in accordance with the principles of the present invention, shown in FIG. 13. The mold 400 includes a base portion 402 forming the sides
20 of the mold 400 and a lid 404. The lid 404 is pivotally attached to the back side 403 of the base portion 402 as with hinges 406 to allow access to the inside of the mold

400. The use of hinges 406 and 407 provide for controlled positioning of the lid 404 relative to the rest of the mold 400 in a reliably repetitive manner. Of course, those skilled in the art will appreciate after understanding the principles of the present invention that other mechanisms may be employed to position the lid 404 relative to the rest of the mold 400. The lid 404 is pivotally actuated with actuator 408 preferably comprising a hydraulic ram controlled by hydraulic control valve 410. Sensor 412 is provided to detect when the lid 404 is in a closed position and is positioned near the proximal end 414 of the lid 404. Sensor 416 is also provided proximate the distal end 418 of the lid 404 to detect when the lid 404 is in an open position. The lid 404 supports a slurry compression system, generally indicated at 420 which is configured for precise compression of a slurry batch contained within the mold 400 to produce individual building units having substantially precise dimensions. The slurry compression system 420 includes an upper lifting bar 422 to which actuators 424 and 426, preferably hydraulic lifting rams are attached, guides 428 and 430 and sensors 432 and 434 for detecting top plate elevation.

A hold down device 435 is provided to lock the lid 404 to the base portion 402 of the mold 400 during the compression phase of the operation. Each hold down device 435 preferably comprises an air ram controlling a tapered
5 hold down pin and an electronic sensor to determine whether the hold down pin is properly engaged. An air valve controller is provided to control actuation of the air ram.

As shown in FIG. 14 the lid 404 comprises a frame having a first side 440, a second side 441, a distal end 418
10 and a proximal end 414. A plurality of cross-members 442-446 depend from and are interposed between the sides 440 and 441 of the lid 404. The cross-members 442-446 define a plurality of apertures 448-453 corresponding to chambers within the mold 400. Four actuators 424, 426, 436 and 438,
15 preferably hydraulic or pneumatic rams, secured to lifter bar 422 that essentially forms a rectangular frame, raise and lower the lifter bar 422 to precisely control compression of the slurry contained within the mold 400.

Referring now to FIG. 15, a plurality of compression
20 plates 460-465 are secured to the lifter bar 422 shown in FIG. 14. Each compression plate, such as plate 460, is configured to relatively closely fit within the individual

chambers of the mold 400 but have enough clearance to allow relatively easy insertion and removal therefrom without becoming jammed within the mold 400. As such, the perimeter 480 of the plate 460 includes external features 481-484 to

5 substantially match the contour of the inner surface of the mold 400 thus keeping any substantial amount of slurry from passing between the plate 460 and the inside surface of the mold 400 during the compression process. The plate 460 includes a first elongate side member 466 and a second

10 opposing elongate side member 467, a first end 468 and a second end 469 interposed between and depending from the sides 466 and 467 to essentially form a rectangular plate. A plurality of cross-members 470, 471 and 472 are interposed between and depend from the first and second side members

15 466 and 467 to define a plurality of apertures 473, 474, 475 and 476.

As further shown in FIG. 16, the apertures 473-476 of the plate 460 are sized and shaped to fit over pillars 490-493 that are positioned inside the mold 400 for forming

20 internal chambers inside the finished building units in accordance with the present invention. The other pillars, such as pillars 496-500, are similarly positioned relative

to the other plates 461-465. Each pillar, such as pillar 490 is generally rectangular in shape, but may have other geometric configurations, and is preferably tapered from proximate its proximal end 502 to proximate its distal end

5 504. This taper 506 allows for easier vertical removal of the building units such that as a building unit is lifted from the pillars 490-493, the building unit will effectively disengage from contacting the pillars 490-493 after a relatively small lifting displacement of the building unit
10 relative to the pillars 490-493. Such disengagement substantially prevents the building units from becoming damaged by rubbing against the pillars 490-493 during removal and reduces the possibility of jamming the building unit within the mold during removal.

15 As further shown in FIG. 17, the plates 460-465 fit within cavities 510-515, respectively, of the mold 400 and can be raised and lowered within the cavities with the hydraulic rams or actuators 424, 426, 436 and 438 a precise amount to compress slurry contained within the mold 400.

20 This precise movement of the plates creates a precise volume within each chamber or cavity 510-515 to produce building units with relatively precise outer dimensions (e.g., +/-

0.03 inch). Producing such building units in accordance with the present invention that have such precise tolerances compared to other similar building units known in the art allows the building units to be dry stacked since there is
5 little variance in wall height along a length of stacked building units for a given height wall.

Referring again to FIG. 13, the mold 400 also includes a block raising device, generally indicated at 520 for raising the at least partially cured building units from the
10 mold 400. The lifting device 520 comprises a lower lifting bar 522 to which a plurality of lifting arms 526-531 are attached. The lifting arms 526-531 are secured to the lower lifting bar 522 with threaded rods 533 and thus may be adjusted relative to the lower lifting bar 522. As the
15 lifting bar 522 is raised from a molding position, the lifting arms 526-531 move in unison to raise building units formed inside the mold 400 out of the mold for further processing. The lifting bar 522 may be raised and lowered with various devices known in the art including
20 hydraulically or pneumatically driven actuators or, as is shown in FIG. 13, an electric motor 534 which is linked to ball screws 536 and 538. The motor 534 is coupled to a

first gear box 540 which drives a pair of shafts 542 and 544. The shafts 542 and 544 are connected to a pair of right angle gear boxes 546 and 548, respectively.

As further shown in FIG. 18, the ball screws 536 and 550 are interconnected with shaft 552 and unions 554 and 556 so that the ball screws 536 and 550 are controlled and driven in unison to raise and lower the lower lifting bar 522. External boots 558 and 560 are provided over the ball screws contained therein to protect the threads from contamination that may otherwise hinder their performance. As the motor 534 causes rotation of the shafts 542, 544 and 552, the ball screws rotate relative to internally threaded collars 560 and 562 that are coupled to the lifter bar 522 causing the collars 560 and 562 to raise or lower the lower lift bar 522 depending on the direction of rotation of the ball screws. Because all four ball screws are controlled in unison by a single motor in a substantially symmetrical and uniform manner, the lifter bar 522 can be raised or lowered while staying in a level plane.

Control of the various components of the mold 400 are preferably computer controlled as with a PLC 564. Thus, each movement of the mold 400 can be precisely controlled

and proceed in a preprogrammed and orderly manner. That is, in operation, the lid 404 of the mold 400 is in an open position to receive cementitious slurry therein. In addition, the lifter arms 526-531 have been lowered and the plates 460-465 have been raised. After receiving a batch of slurry, the lid 404 of the mold 400 is closed and locked in position, and the plates 460-465 are lowered into the mold to compress the slurry contained therein. After a few minutes when the slurry has cured to at least a "green" state whereby the now formed building units can be handled, the plates 460-465 are raised, and the lid 404 is opened. The lower lifter arms 526-531 are then raised to force the "green" blocks from the mold 400 for removal therefrom.

Referring now to FIG. 19, the mold 400 is illustrated with its sides removed and in an open position. In addition, the lifting arms 526-531 are shown in a fully extended position (i.e., a position whereby the block can be removed from the mold 400). The mold 400 is comprised of a plurality of internal walls or panels 600-606, of which panels 600 and 606 form the proximal and distal ends, respectively, of the mold 400. The panels 600-606 form a plurality of internal chambers 610-615 within the mold for

forming, in this example, six individual building units each time the mold 400 is filled with a slurry. Attached to the top of each arm 526-531 is a bottom mold plate 620-625 each of which fit relatively tightly within the chambers 610-615, respectively, while still allowing vertical movement of the plates 620-625 therein. Each plate 620-625 is configured to form the bottom of the building unit, such as that shown in FIG. 9. As such, the plates 620-625 include reverse impressions of the mating features of the block. In addition, as with the plates 460-465, the perimeter of each plate 620-625 is configured to match the configuration of the chambers 610-615 including the tongue and groove features. As such, the mold 400 is provided with upper actuatable plate members 460-465 for compressing the slurry within the mold 400 and lower actuatable plate members 620-625 for lifting the cured building units from the mold 400. Those skilled in the art, however, will appreciate that actuation of either or both sets of plates could be employed to compress the slurry contained therein to obtain the beneficial results of compression taught by the present invention.

As further illustrated in FIG. 19, the actuators 424 and 426 are provided with longitudinally extending shafts 425 and 427, respectively. The distal ends of the shafts 424 and 427 are attached to the lid 404 while the body of the actuators 424 and 426 is attached to the upper lifting bar. When the plates 460-465 are in a retracted position as is shown in FIG. 19, the shafts 425 and 427 are in an extended position. When the lid 404 of the mold 400 is in a closed position, retraction of the shafts 425 and 427 into the body of the actuators 424 and 426 cause the lifter bar 422 to lower and the upper lifting arms, such as arm 429, and plates 460-465 to extend into the mold cavities 610-615 until the sensors 432 and 434 detect the desired precise position of the guides 428 and 430.

As illustrated in FIG. 20, the panels 680-688 of a mold 690 in accordance with the present invention are provided with a plurality of heat pipes or pathways 691-699 for circulating water or another heated fluid through the mold 690. As shown in FIG. 21, the heat pipes, such as heat pipe 695, serpentine throughout the panel 680 to provide even heating throughout the mold 690. As previously discussed, the molds 690 are preferably heated to a temperature above

the critical temperature of the foam in order to collapse the foam and form a dense outer layer or shell around the building units. Those skilled in the art will appreciate that the molds 690 may also be heated with electrical heating elements or other means known in the art.

As further shown in FIGS. 20, 21 and 22, the mold 690 is bolted together with a plurality of fasteners 700 that engage the panels 691, 693, 695, 696, 697, 698 and 699 through holes 702 and are secured into threaded holes in the panels. In addition, in order to define internal passageways to circulate water through each panel, each panel 691-699 is comprised of a pair of plates, such as plates 704 and 706 and plates 708 and 710. The passageways 712 and 714 are formed by cutting or milling channels in the plates 706 and 710 of the pair of plates. When the other plates 704 and 708 are attached to the first plates 706 and 710, respectively, as with rows of threaded fasteners in a patten similar to that shown with respect to panel 680, circulation passageways 714 and 712, respectively, are formed in the panels 692 and 699, respectively. Thus, with respect to plate 706, tongue and groove features 720 and 722 are formed on the front side 724 of the plate 706 while flow

ways 714 are formed in the back 726 of the plate 706. For assembly purposes, recesses 728 may be formed in the plate 706 to receive the panels, such as panel 687.

Referring now to FIGS. 23A and 23B, a mixing device,

5 generally indicated at 750, in accordance with the principles of the present invention, is illustrated. The mixer 750 is comprised of a generally cylindrical vessel 752 that is rotatably mounted proximate a longitudinal axis thereof to a support frame 754. The vessel 752 is coupled
10 to a first drive motor 756 that may be controlled to rotate the vessel in order to dump its contents. A second drive motor 758 is coupled to the vessel 752 to rotate paddles 760 and 762 within the vessel 752 for mixing a cementitious slurry contained within the mixing vessel 752. An elongate
15 spout 764 which preferably extends along a substantial length of the vessel 752 is provided to dispense slurry when the vessel 752 is rotated with motor 756. The spout 764 is attached to the vessel proximate to an around a perimeter of an opening 766 formed therein. The spout 764 is preferably
20 tangentially offset relative to the vessel 752 such that the center line C of the spout 764 is spaced from and substantially parallel to a line defined by a diameter of

the vessel 752. This tangential offset is preferably opposite to the direction of rotation of the vessel 752. Offsetting the spout 764 helps prevent slurry contained within the vessel 752 from prematurely flowing out of the spout 764 when the vessel 752 is rotated in the direction of arrow 768 when dispensing of the slurry is desired. When dispensing the slurry is desired, the motor 756 rotates the vessel 752 to a position where the spout 764 has been rotated approximately 180 degrees from the position shown in FIG. 23B. After dispensing the slurry, the vessel 752 is preferably further rotated in the direction of arrow 768 back to the position shown in FIG. 23B for receiving another batch of ingredients to be mixed.

FIG. 24 illustrates a block manufacturing apparatus, generally indicated at 800, that utilizes the various new and novel devices described herein, for forming lightweight concrete blocks in accordance with the principles of the present invention. The apparatus 800 is comprised of a plurality of molds, two of which are indicated at 802 and 804, preferably arranged in rows or banks. A mixing device, generally indicated at 806 is suspended above the molds with an overhead truss, generally indicated at 808. The mixing

device 806 can move in the direction of arrow 810 relative to the truss 808 for positioning over the molds 802 and 804. This is preferably accomplished by motor driven wheel/track arrangements 809 and 811. The truss 808 is attached to an
5 overhead mezzanine structure, generally indicated at 812, and is movable relative thereto in a direction perpendicular to the arrow 810. Specifically, the truss 808 is coupled to tracks 814 and 816 and is motor driven with motors 818 and 820 for positioning the mixing device 806 in alignment with
10 a desired mold.

In operation, the mixing device 806 is positioned below a "dry" ingredient measuring device, generally indicated at 822, comprising a plurality of hoppers 824, 826 and 828 for receiving three separate dry ingredients, preferably
15 standard cement, sand, and a quick setting cement. At the bottom of each hopper 824, 826 and 828 are provided computer controllable valves or discharge control mechanisms 830, 832 and 834 that can selectively control the discharge of ingredients from the hoppers 824, 826 and 828, respectively.

20 As shown in FIG. 25, the discharge control mechanism 830 is comprised of a plate 842 that is slidably engaged with the opening 840 of the hopper 824. The position of the

plate 842 relative to the opening 840 is controlled with an actuator 842, in this example a pneumatic piston, that can be extended or retracted to at least three positions. The discharge control mechanism 830 can close the opening 840 as is shown in solid lines or partially or completely open the opening 840 as is indicated by dashed lines. In order to better control measurement of the dry ingredients, the discharge control mechanism 830 can fully open the opening 840 to allow maximum flow of ingredient until the desired amount is nearly reached, for example about 90 percent of the desired amount. The plate 842 can then be positioned to partially close the opening 840 to restrict the flow of the ingredient until 100 percent of the desired amount is reached. As such, more accurate measurement is achieved while substantially maximizing the discharge flow rate.

The dry ingredients are measured by dispensing the ingredients from each of the hoppers 824, 826 and 828 into a weighing hopper 850 that include an electronic scale. The ingredients are individually dispensed into the hopper 850 such that a first ingredient is dispensed until a first desired weight is reached. Similarly, a second ingredient is dispensed until a second desired weight is reached. The

third ingredient can then be dispensed until a third weight is reached. Of course, more or less ingredients can be dispensed in this manner depending on the composition of the cement.

5 After the ingredients have been measured, the ingredients are gravity fed into the mixer 806 through openings 852 in the hopper that are fully opened with actuators 854 similar to that shown with respect to FIG. 25. The dry ingredients are then mixed with foam produced by a
10 foam generator 856. The foam is preferably dispensed through a line 858 that exits between the openings 852 of the hopper 850. Heated water is also provided in the mixer 806. The amount of water is preferably controlled by opening a valve for a set period of time in order to meter
15 the water into the mixer 806.

As shown in FIG. 26, once the ingredients are all in the mixer 806, the mixer can be moved from beneath the hopper while the mixing process occurs to efficiently utilize the slurry transport time to a mold 804.

20 Preferably, the mixer is transported in a direction perpendicular to the arrow 860 until the mixer is aligned with the mold 804. The mixer is then moved in the direction

of arrow 860 until the mixer is properly positioned above the mold 804. Preferably, this movement of the mixer occurs at two separate speeds, the first speed being faster than the second to quickly transport the mixer and thus the
5 slurry to a position near the mold and then a second speed for precise positioning over the mold at a slower rate.

Once the mixer 806 is positioned over the mold, the mixer 806 is rotated to dispense the mixed slurry into a slurry dispensing hopper 862. The slurry hopper 862 is
10 comprised of an open top portion 864 and a plurality of individual hoppers 866 at its bottom portion 868. The hopper 862 is sized such that a single slurry batch fills the hopper 862 above the tops of the individual hoppers 866. As such, when a single batch of slurry is poured from the
15 mixer 806 into the hopper 862 the slurry is evenly distributed within the hopper 862 in the top portion 864. The hopper 862 is then lowered to the mold 804 with actuators 870 and 872. The individual hoppers 866 are then opened and the slurry is dispensed in substantially equal
20 amounts through each individual hopper 866 into the mold. The individual hoppers 866 are provided in equal numbers for each of the individual mold chambers within the mold 804.

The hopper 862 is then raised to a position proximate the mixer 806 and the mixer is returned to a position below the weighing hopper 850 for receiving the next batch of dry ingredients. Preferably, the dry ingredients have been
5 premeasured while the mixer 806 was transporting the slurry to the mold 804.

It should be understood that the identification of the various steps of the process in accordance with the present invention have been provided with alphabetical identifiers
10 in the claims for the sole purpose of providing easy reference to the various steps, but should not be construed as a limitation in defining the precise order in which such steps are to be performed. On the contrary, those skilled in the art after understanding the principles of the present
15 invention will appreciate that the various steps of the process may be performed in any viable order. For example, the step of adding water to the mix may be performed before or after the dry ingredients are added to the mixer. Other such variations will become apparent to those of skill in
20 the art upon review of the teachings of the present invention.

CLAIMS

What is claimed is:

1. An automated process for forming lightweight concrete building units, comprising the steps of:

- 5 A) providing a plurality of molds;
- B) measuring each of a first plurality of ingredients;
- C) mixing said first plurality of ingredients into a first batch of a cementitious slurry;
- D) pouring said first batch into a first mold;
- 10 E) measuring each of a second plurality of ingredients sufficient to form a second batch while said first batch is mixing;
- F) transporting said first batch while said first batch is mixing;
- 15 G) pouring said first batch into a first mold; and
- H) mixing additional batches, transporting and pouring said additional batches into additional molds until said first batch has cured to at least a point where said at least one first building unit is rigid enough to be
- 20 handled.

2. The process of claim 1, further including the steps of (I) removing said at least one first building unit from said first mold and (J) repeating steps B through H.

5 3. The process of claim 2, further including the step of (K) applying a release agent to each of said plurality of molds prior to receiving a batch of cementitious slurry.

10 4. The process of claim 1, wherein the number of said plurality of molds is approximately equal to the time it takes to perform steps D through H divided by the time it takes to perform steps C through D.

15 5. The process of claim 1, wherein steps (B) and (E) further include the steps of (L) weighing a first ingredient to approximately a first weight, (M) adding a second ingredient to said first ingredient to approximately a second weight, (N) adding a metered amount of a foam and a metered amount of water.

20

6. The process of claim 5, wherein step (N) includes adding said metered amount of water to a mixer before said

first and second ingredients are added to said mixer and wherein said mixer is activated to rinse the inside of said mixer between batches.

5 7. The process of claim 5, further including the step of (O) adding a third ingredient to said first and second ingredients to approximately a third weight.

10 8. The process of claim 5, further including the step of (P) heating said water to a temperature that when combined with the other plurality of ingredients, the temperature of the mixture is below the critical temperature of said foam.

15 9. The process of claim 5, further including the step of (Q) providing a foaming agent heated to a temperature near the critical temperature of said foaming agent, (R) generating a heated foam from said foaming agent, and (S) adding said heated foam to said plurality of ingredients.

20

 10. The process of claim 5, wherein step (L) includes the step of (T) metering said first ingredient at a first

rate to approximately 90 percent of said first weight and metering said first ingredient at a second slower rate to approximately 100 percent of said first weight and step (M) includes the step of (U) metering said second ingredient at
5 a first rate to approximately 90 percent of said second weight and metering said second ingredient at a second slower rate to approximately 100 percent of said second weight.

10 11. The process of claim 7, wherein step (O) includes the step of (V) metering said third ingredient at a first rate to approximately 90 percent of said third weight and metering said third ingredient at a second slower rate to approximately 100 percent of said third weight.

15 12. The process of claim 1, further including the steps of (W) providing a transport container, (X) pouring said first batch into said transport container and (Y) transporting said first batch to said first mold prior to
20 performing step (D).

13. The process of claim 12, further including the step of (Z) returning said transport container for receiving said second batch.

5 14. The process of claim 13, wherein said transport container comprises a mixer.

10 15. The process of claim 11, wherein step (Y) further includes the steps of (AA) transporting said first batch at a first speed to within a relatively short distance of said first mold and (BB) transporting said first batch at a second slower speed to a substantially precise position relative to said first mold.

15 16. The process of claim 13, further including the step of (CC) transporting additional batches to additional molds in substantially the same manner as step Y.

20 17. The process of claim 1, further including heating said plurality of molds to a temperature above the critical temperature of said foam.

18. The process of claim 1, wherein said first ingredient comprises sand, said second ingredient comprises cement, and said third ingredient comprises a quick setting cement.

5

19. The process of claim 1, further including the step of (DD) adding fibrous material to each of said batches at least by the time said each of said batches is still in a slurry state.

10

20. The process of claim 2, further including the step of (EE) transporting said at least one building unit to a hydration station and applying water to said at least one building unit.

15

21. The process of claim 1, further including the step of (FF) compressing said cementitious slurry within said mold to form a lightweight concrete building unit have a substantially precise volume.

20

22. A process for forming lightweight concrete building units, comprising:

(A) adding measured amounts of a plurality of wet and dry ingredients;

(B) mixing said ingredients into a cementitious slurry;

(C) pouring said slurry into a mold;

5 (D) compressing said slurry within said mold in at least one direction to form at least one lightweight concrete building unit having a substantially precise volume when cured;

10 (E) allowing said slurry to cure into at least one building unit;

(F) removing said at least one building units from said mold.

23. The process of claim 22, wherein step (A) further
15 includes the steps of (G) weighing a first ingredient to approximately a first weight, (H) adding a second ingredient to said first ingredient to approximately a second weight, (I) adding a third ingredient to said first and second ingredients to approximately a third weight, (J) adding a
20 metered amount of a foam and (K) adding a metered amount of water.

24. The process of claim 23, further including the
step of (L) heating said water to a first temperature prior
to mixing so that when said dry ingredients are mixed with
said water, a resulting mixture is at a temperature below
5 the critical temperature of said foam.

25. The process of claim 24, further including heating
said plurality of molds to a second temperature above the
critical temperature of said foam.

10

26. The process of claim 25, further including the
step of (M) providing a foaming agent heated to a
temperature near the critical temperature of said foaming
agent and (N) generating a heated foam from said foaming
15 agent.

27. The process of claim 25, wherein said pouring said
slurry into said mold breaks down the foam in an outer layer
of said slurry adjacent said mold forming a more dense outer
20 layer.

28. The process of claim 22, wherein step (G) includes the step of (O) metering said first ingredient at a first rate to an amount slightly less than said first weight and metering said first ingredient at a second slower rate to an amount substantially equal to said first weight, step (H) includes the step of (P) metering said second ingredient at a first rate to an amount slightly less than said second weight and metering said second ingredient at a second slower rate to an amount substantially equal to said second weight, and step (I) includes the step of (Q) metering said third ingredient at a first rate to an amount slightly less than said third weight and metering said third ingredient at a second slower rate to an amount substantially equal to said third weight.

29. The process of claim 28, wherein said first ingredient comprises sand, said second ingredient comprises cement, and said third ingredient comprises a quick setting cement.

30. The process of claim 29, further including the step of (R) adding fibrous material to said cementitious slurry.

5 31. The process of claim 21, further including the step of (S) hydrating said at least one building unit.

32. A process for forming lightweight concrete building units, comprising the steps of:

- 10 (A) providing a mold;
- (B) adding an aerated cementitious slurry to said mold;
- (C) compressing said aerated cementitious slurry within said mold a substantially precise amount in at least one direction causing said aerated cementitious slurry to
- 15 increase in density and creating a lightweight concrete building unit having a substantially precise volume.

33. The process of claim 32, further including the step of (D) heating said mold to a temperature above a

20 critical temperature of said aerated slurry to collapse air cells along a surface of said mold.

34. The process of claim 32, wherein step (C) includes causing air cells proximate the outer surface of said lightweight building unit to collapse resulting in said lightweight building unit having a denser outer layer along
5 at least one surface thereof when cured.

35. The process of claim 32, further including the step of (E) compressing said aerated cementitious slurry in a second direction for imprinting a texture on at least one
10 outer surface of said lightweight building unit.

36. The process of claim 32, wherein said cementitious slurry is comprised of sand, cement, a quick setting cement, fibers, foam and water.
15

37. The process of claim 36, further including the step of (F) providing a heated aerated cementitious slurry.

38. The process of claim 32, further including the
20 step of (G) hydrating said lightweight concrete building unit.

39. A process for forming a lightweight concrete building unit utilizing a mold that is capable of compressing the slurry to a substantially precise volume, comprising:

5 (A) providing a batch of an aerated cementitious slurry having a volume greater than the substantially precise volume;

(B) pouring the slurry into a mold;

10 (C) compressing the slurry within the mold until the substantially precise volume is reached; and

(D) allowing the slurry to cure within the mold; whereby the cured lightweight concrete building unit has a denser outer layer and a substantially precise volume.

15 40. The process of claim 39, wherein the lightweight concrete building unit has external features for interlocking with other similar building units.

20 41. The process of claim 40, wherein the lightweight concrete building unit can be dry stacked with other similar building units.

42. A process for forming lightweight concrete building units, comprising the steps of:

(A) selecting a foaming agent having a first critical temperature;

5 (B) generating a foam from said foaming agent;

(C) forming a cementitious slurry at a first temperature below said first critical temperature;

(D) adding said foam to said cementitious slurry;

10 (E) providing a heated mold having a surface temperature above said first critical temperature; and

(F) pouring said cementitious slurry into said heated mold.

43. The process of claim 42, further including (G) compressing said cementitious slurry within said mold to a
15 substantially precise volume.

44. The process of claim 42, wherein said foaming agent has a second critical temperature above which said foam will collapse.

20

45. The process of claim 44, wherein said mold is heated to a second temperature above said second critical temperature.

5 46. The process of claim 42, wherein said first critical temperature is approximately 100 degrees Fahrenheit, said second critical temperature is approximately 150 degrees Fahrenheit, said first temperature is approximately 90 degrees Fahrenheit, and said second
10 temperature is approximately 180 degrees Fahrenheit.

ABSTRACT

A method and apparatus for efficiently forming individual building units is provided, generally includes providing a plurality of molds, each capable of

5 simultaneously forming a plurality of building units.

Batches of cementitious slurry are individually mixed in order to control the density of each building unit formed.

The ingredients are individually measured and combined into the mixing device. The cementitious slurry is then conveyed

10 or transported and poured into one of the molds. The method

provides the ability to control the amount of cementitious slurry in each batch in order to control to the extent

possible the quantity of cementitious slurry poured into each mold and the ability to precisely control the

15 dimensions of each building unit produced.

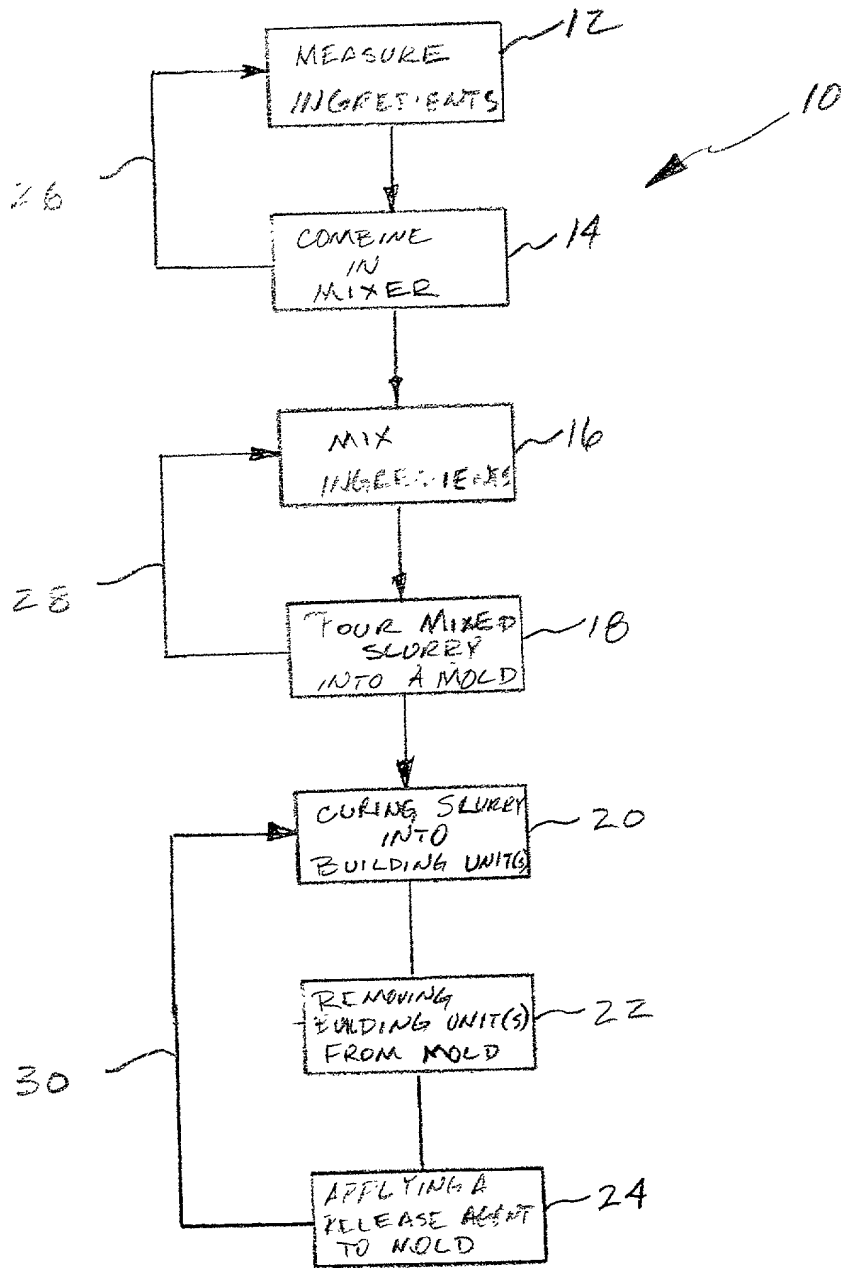
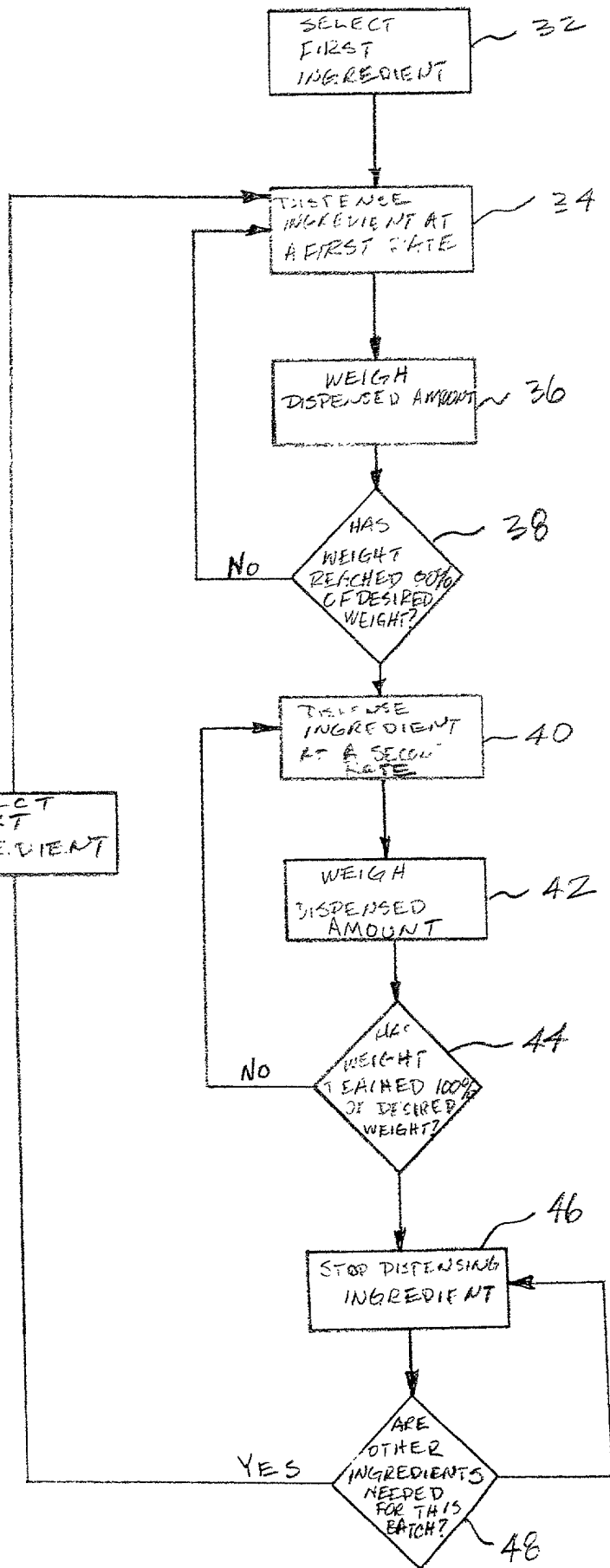


FIG. 1

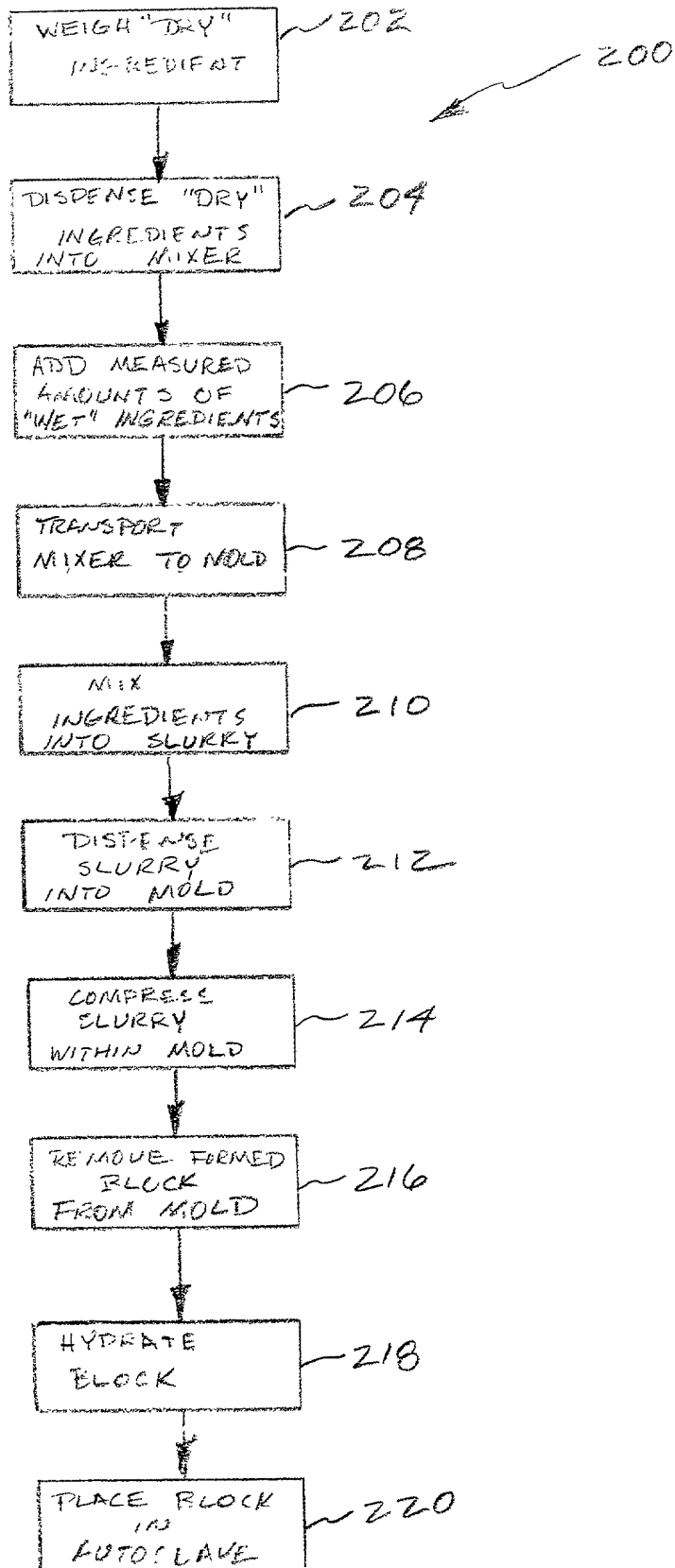
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12

FIG. 2

FIG. 3



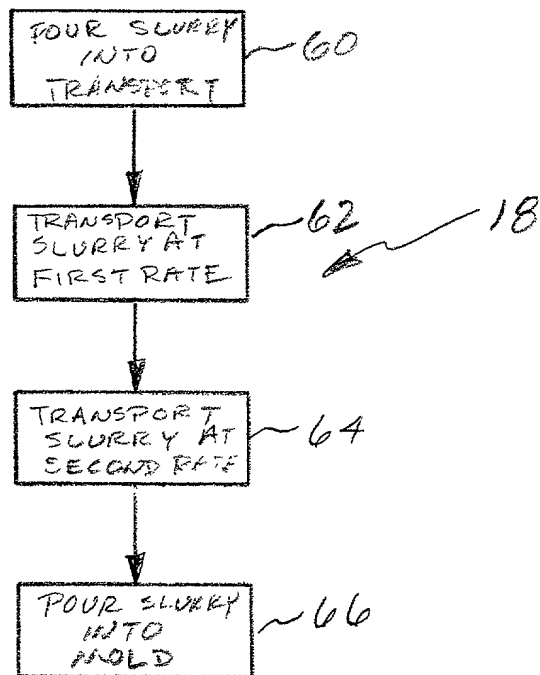


FIG 4

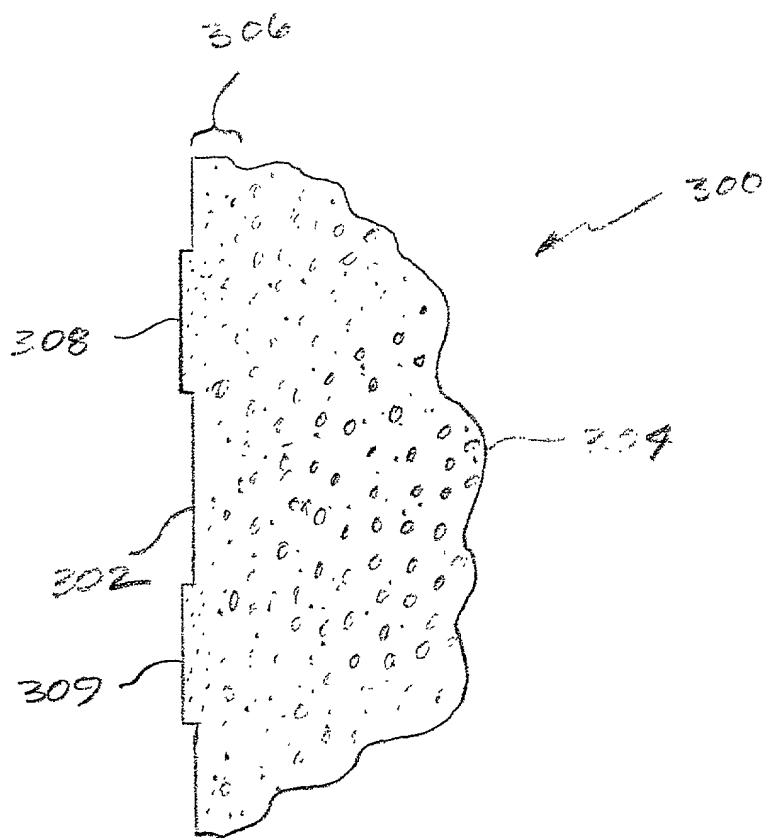


FIG 5

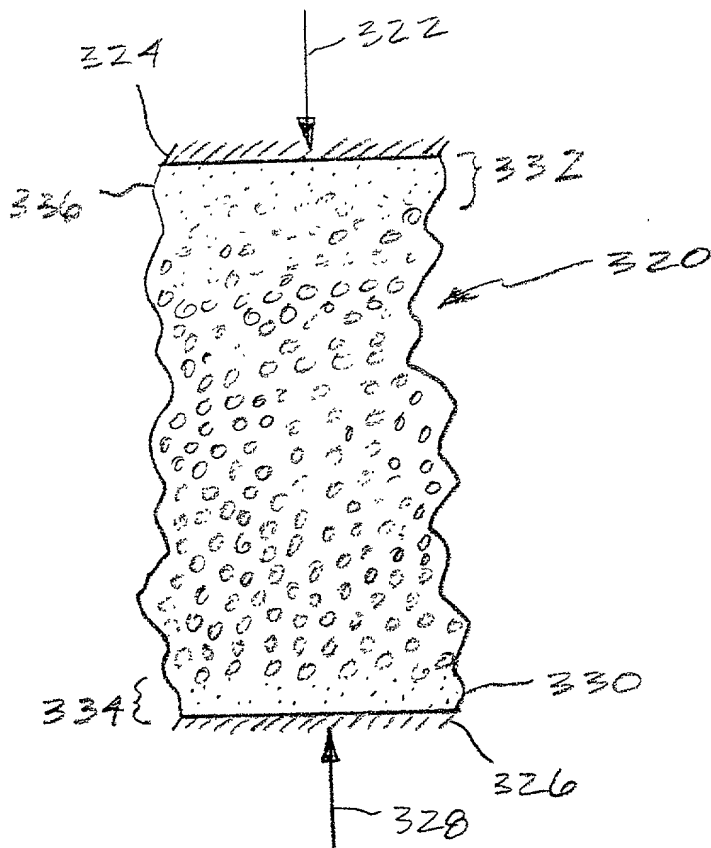
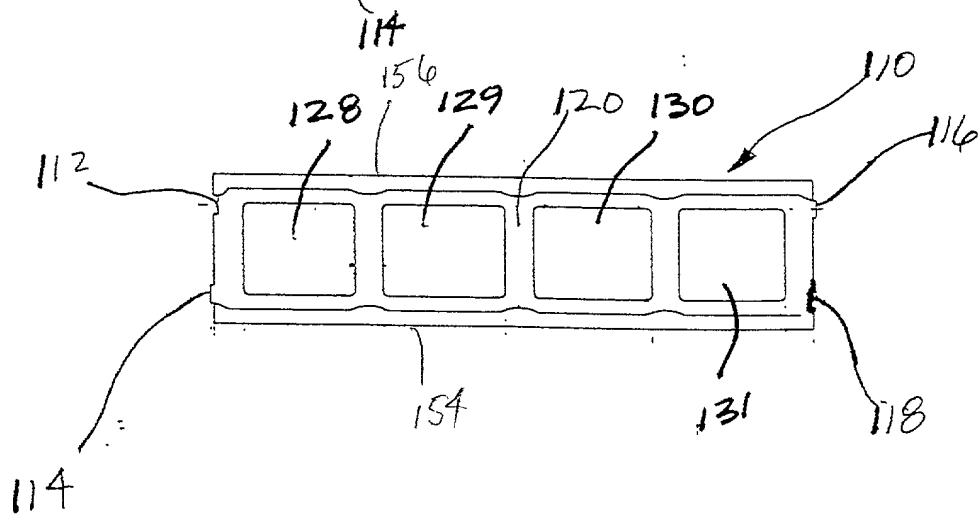
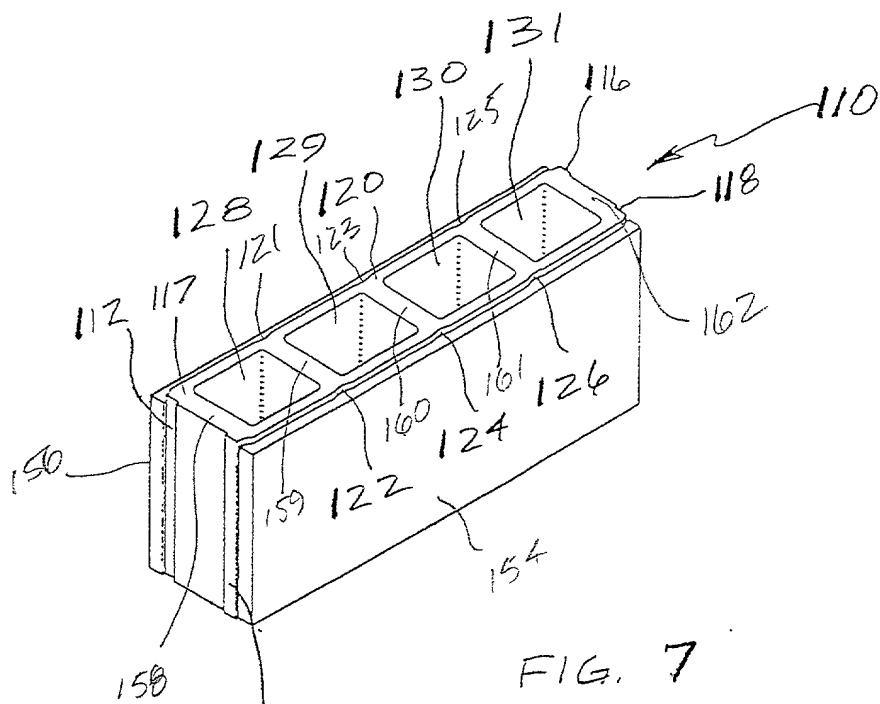


FIG 6



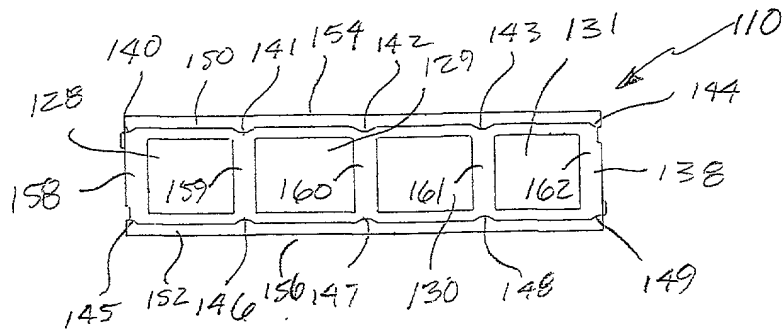
[illegible]

FIG. 9

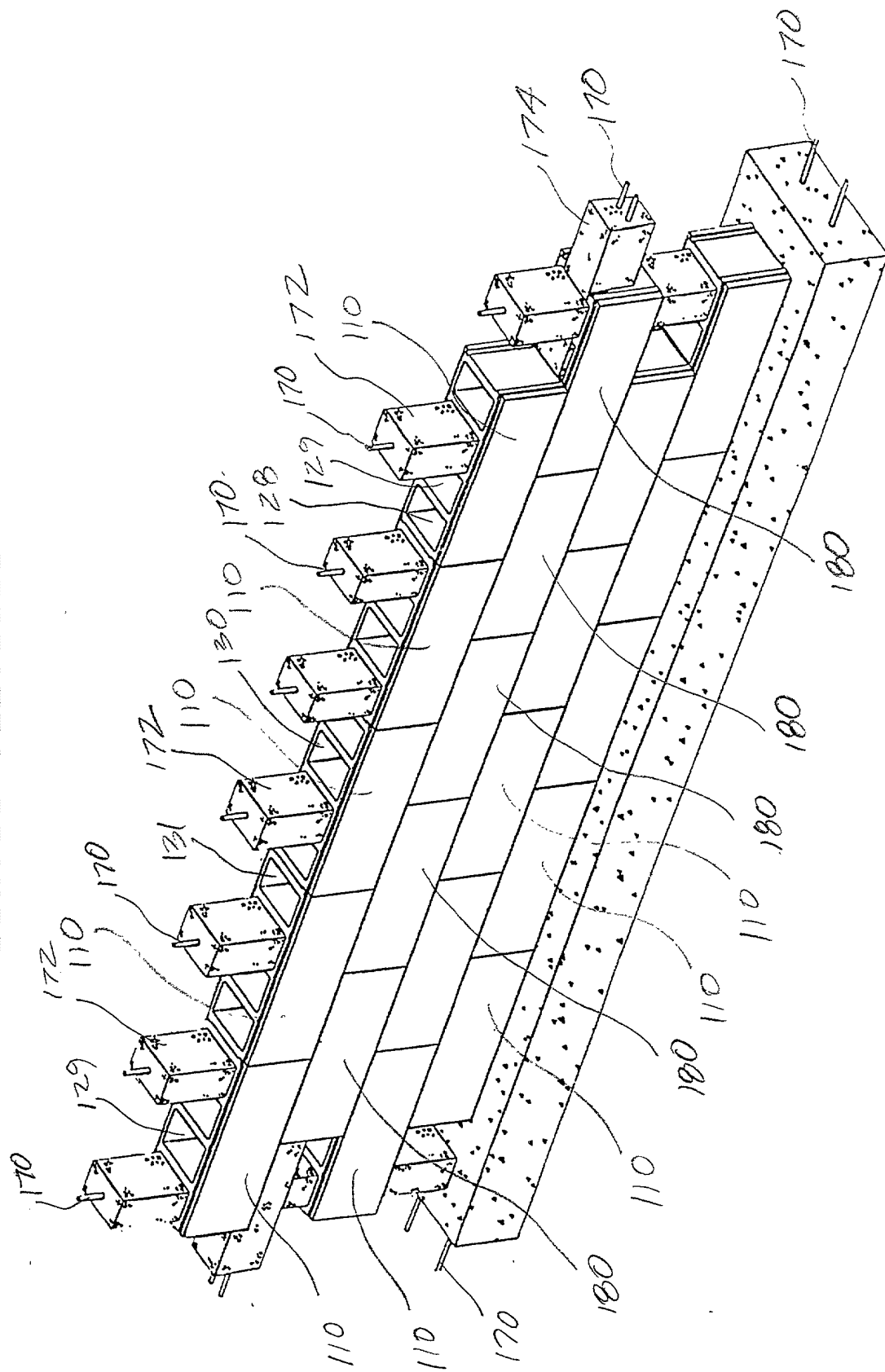
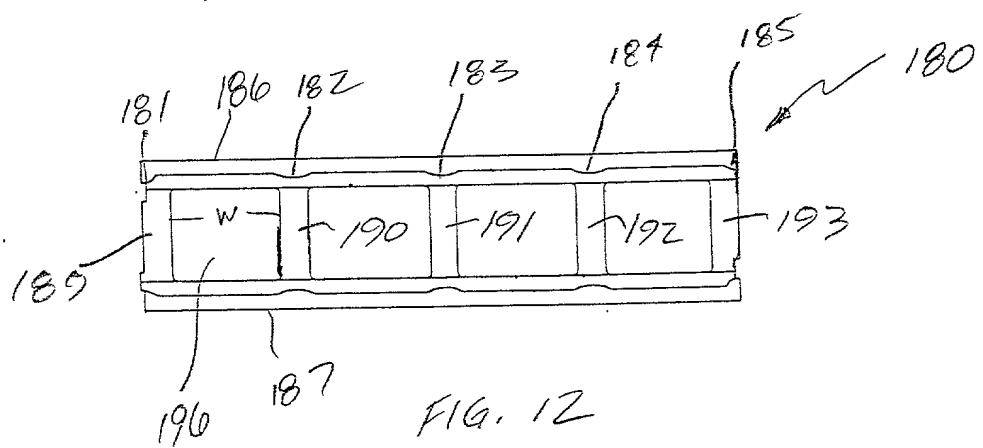
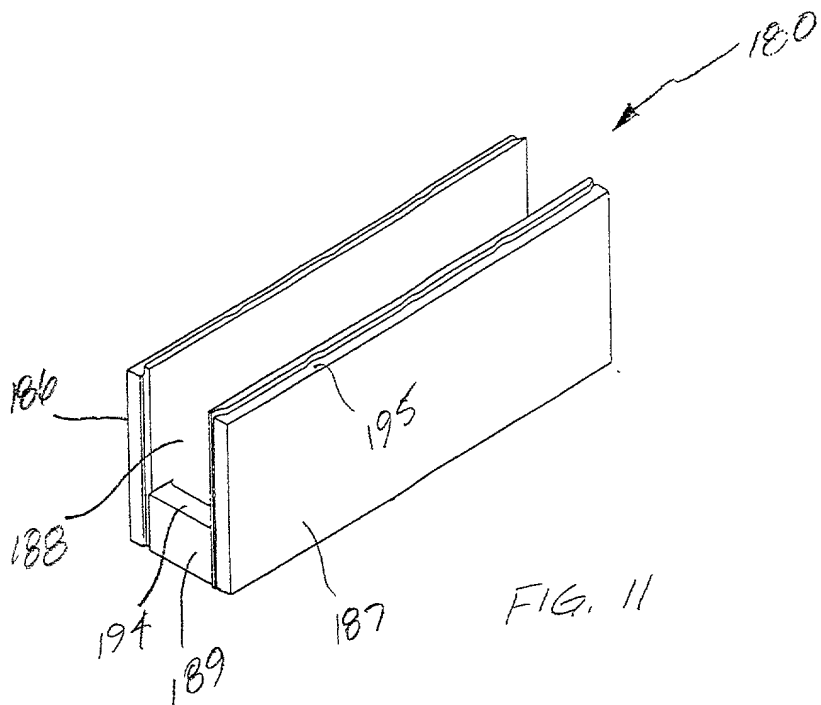


FIG. 10



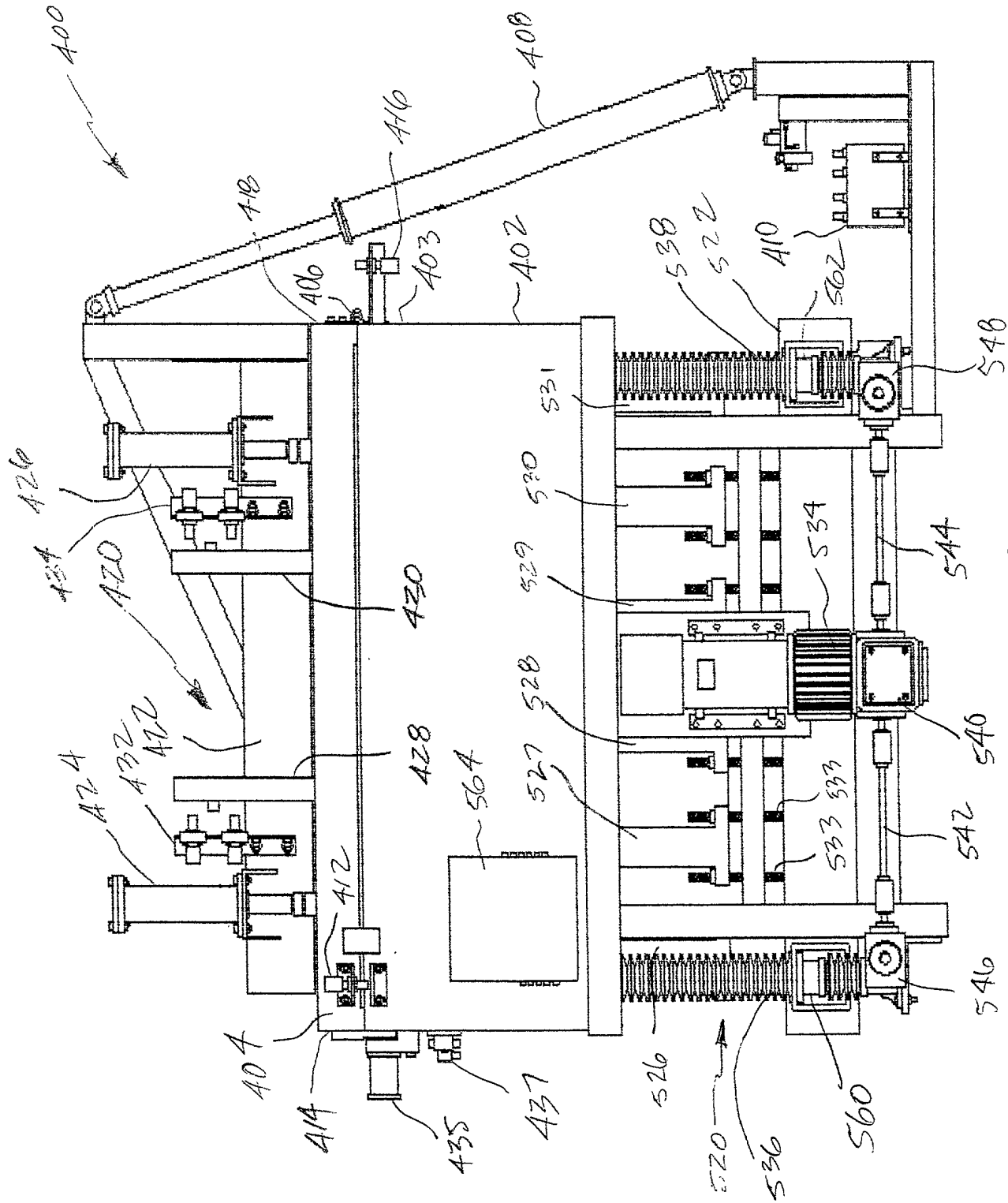


FIG. 13

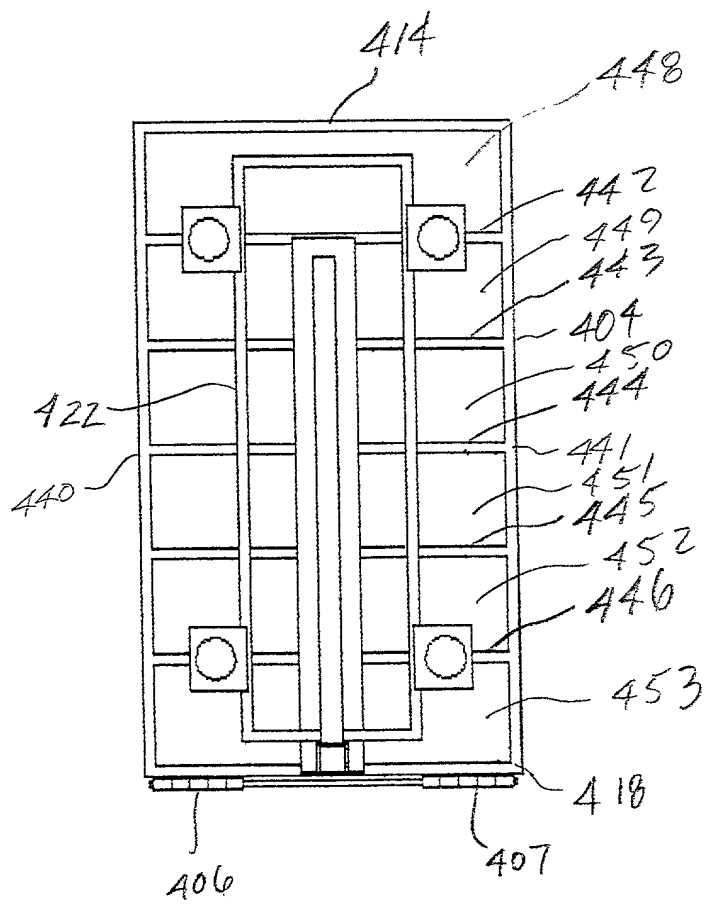


FIG. 14

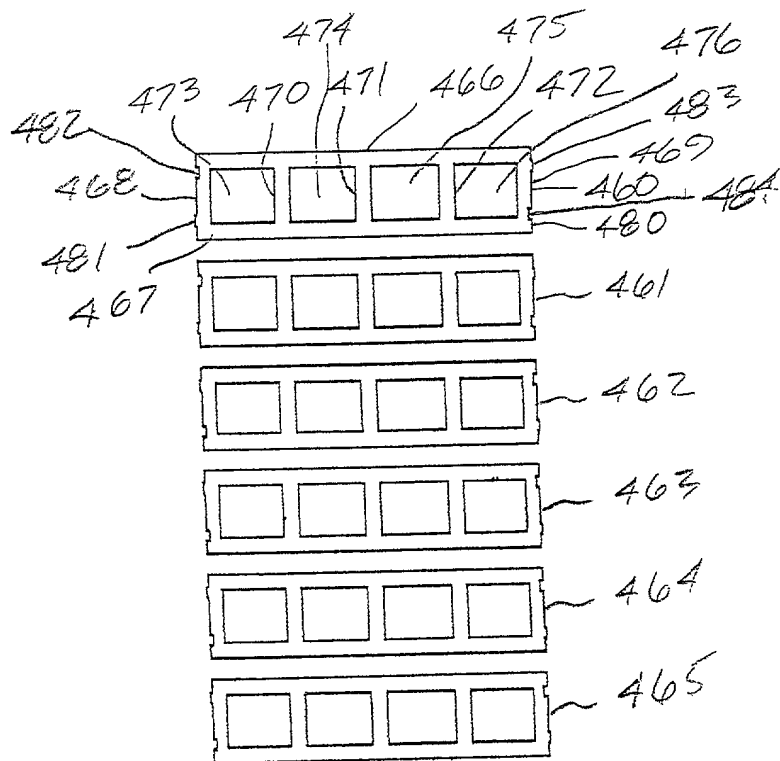


FIG. 15

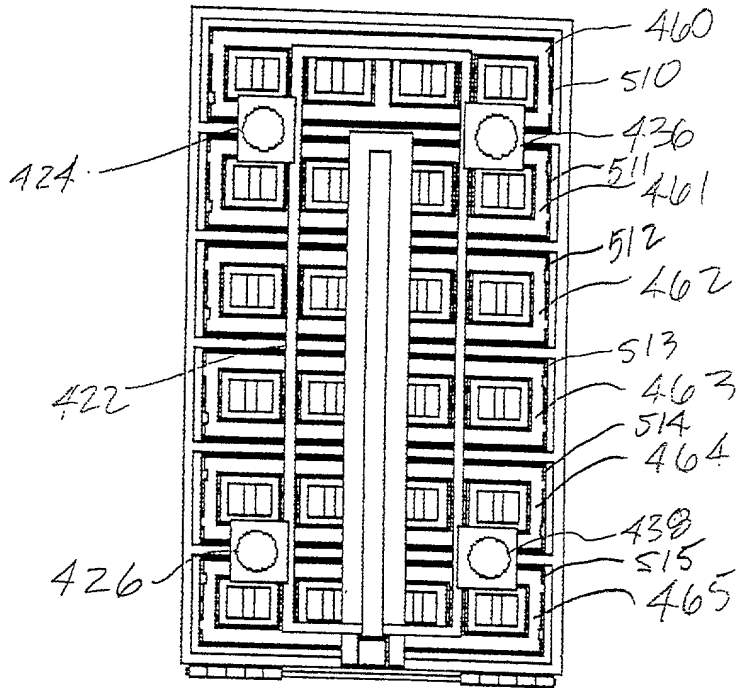


FIG. 17

FIG. 18

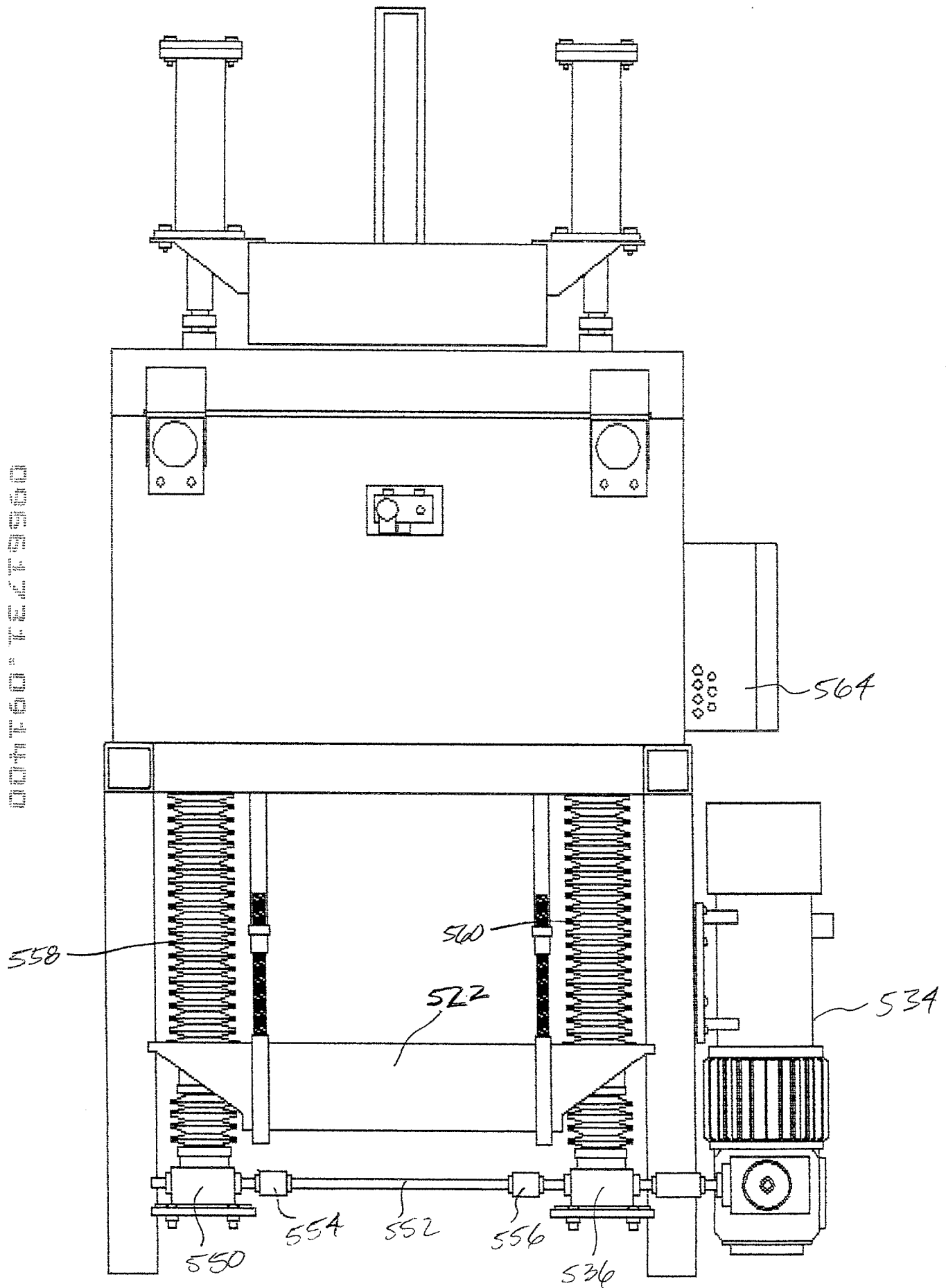


FIG. 18

600 620 601 621 602 622 603 623 604 624 605 625

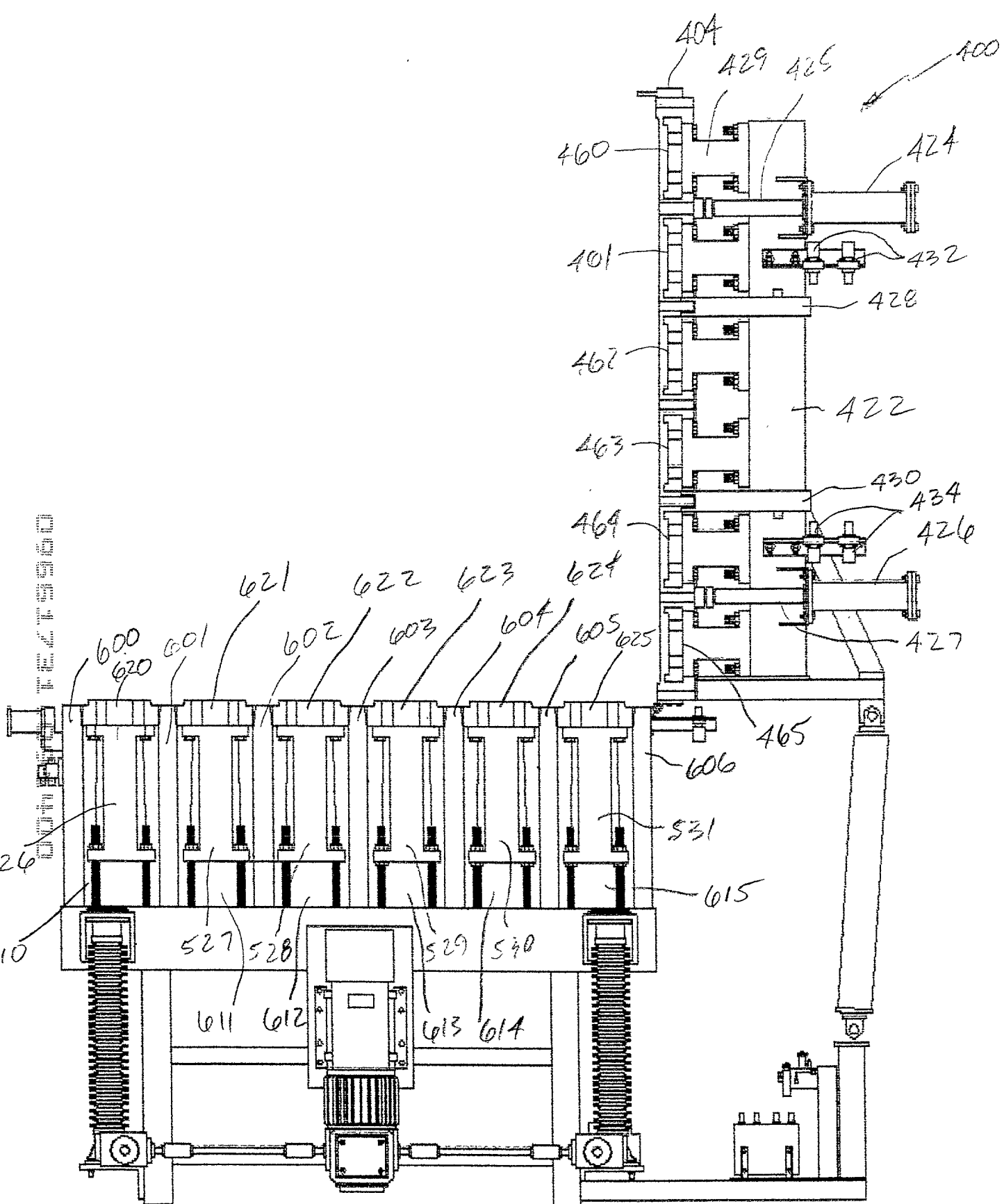


FIG. 19

AIRCRETE

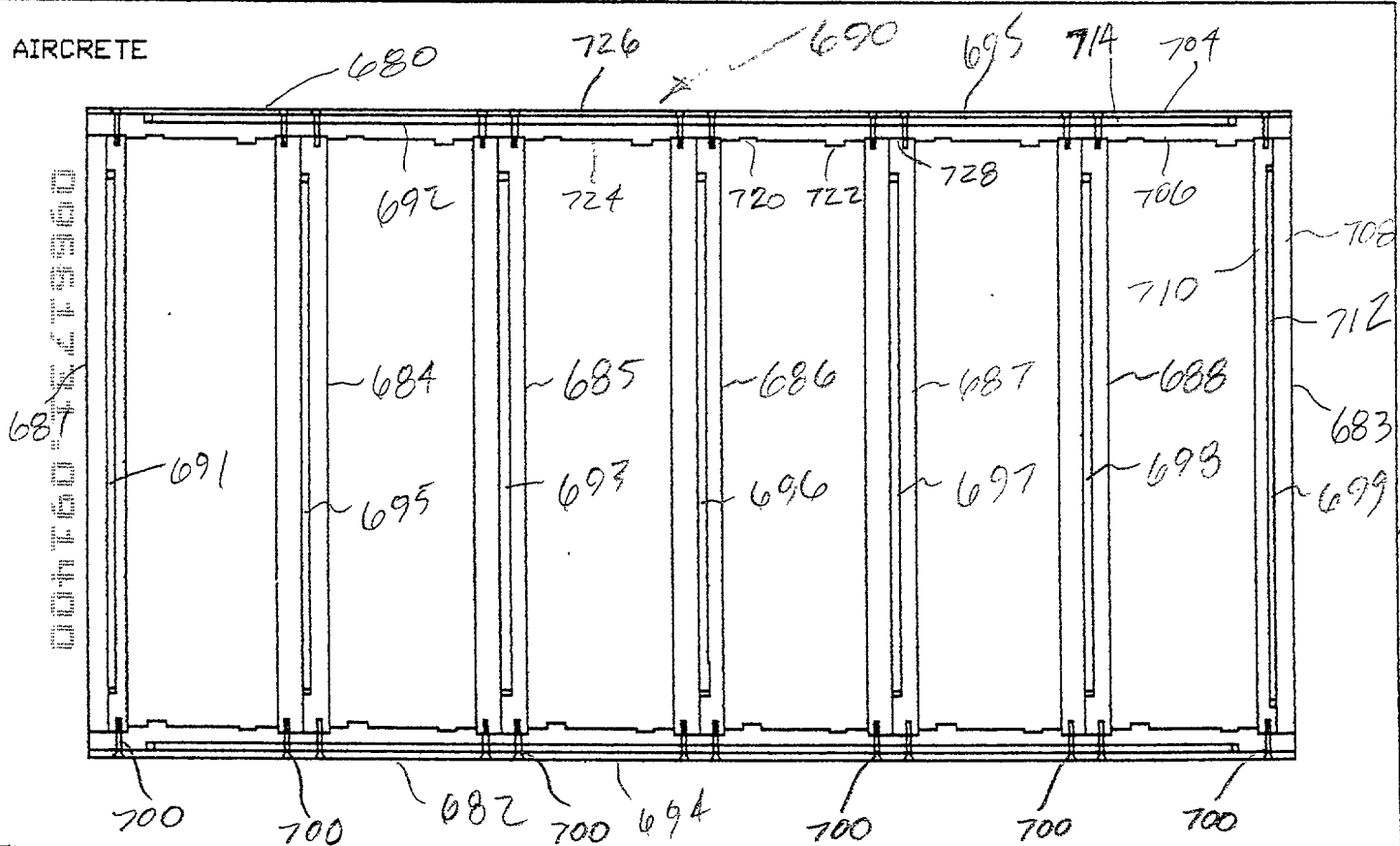


FIG 20

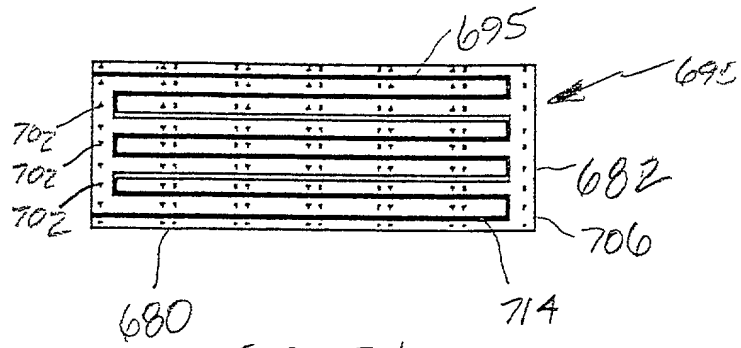


FIG. 21

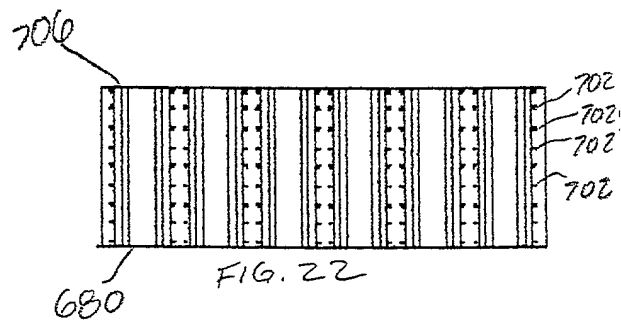


FIG. 22

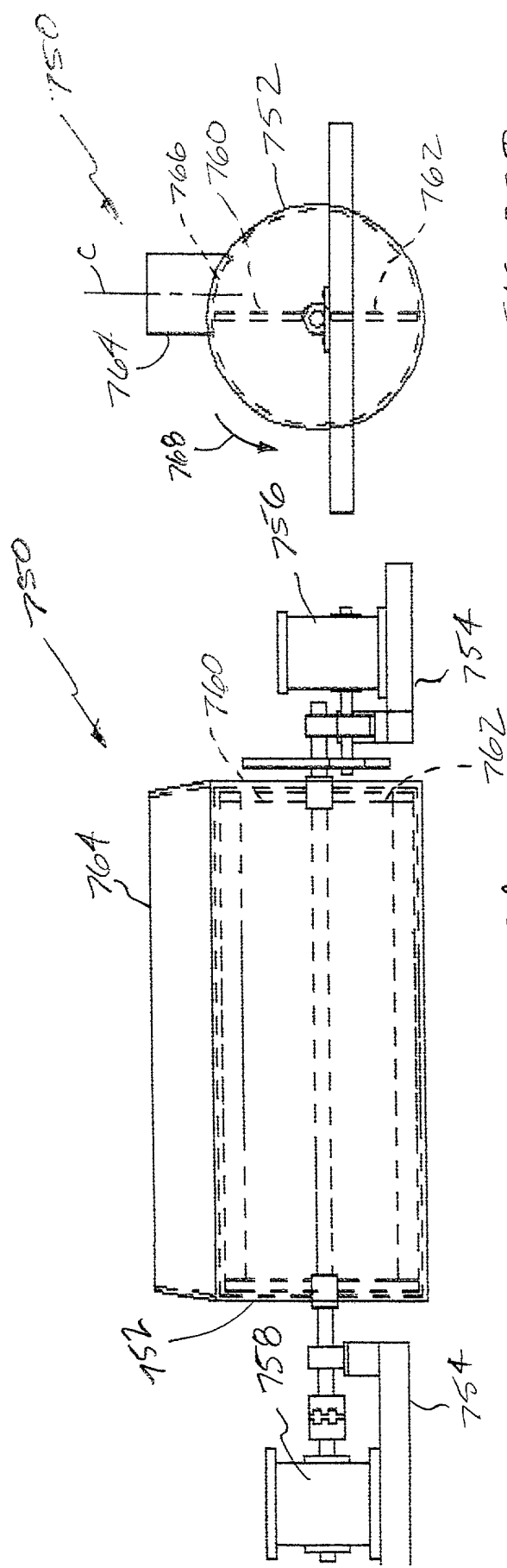
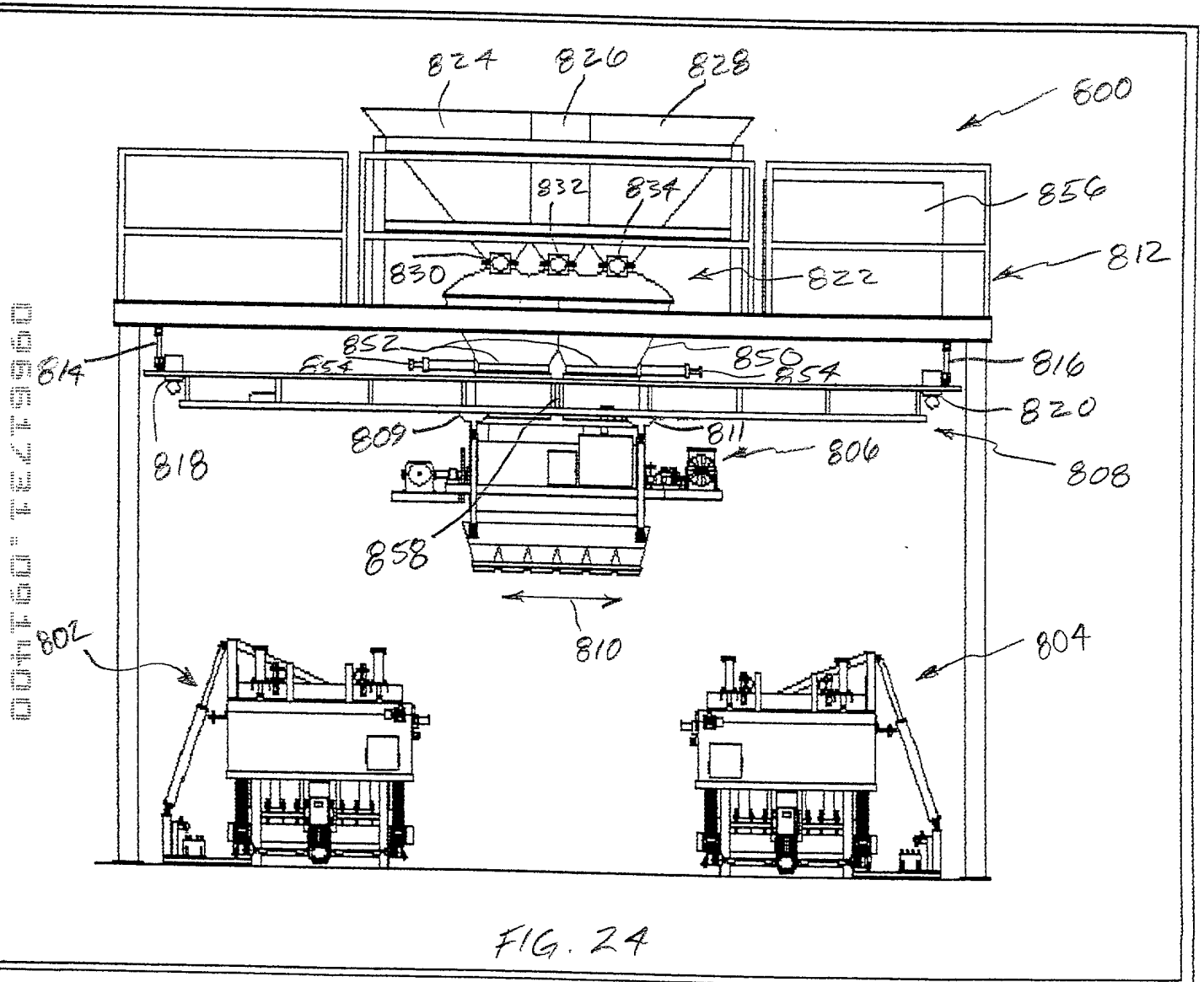


FIG. 23A

FIG. 23B



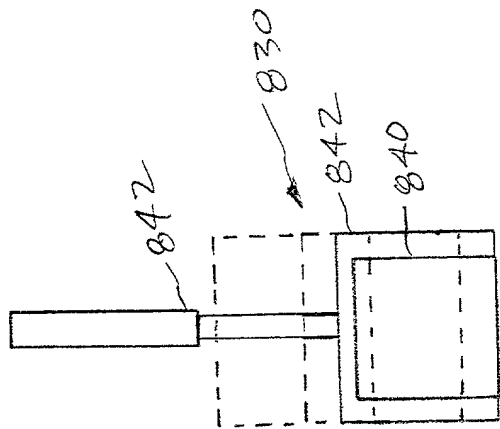


FIG. 25

Variable	Mean	Standard Deviation	Minimum	Maximum
Age	35.2	10.5	22	55
Gender	0.5	0.5	0	1
Marital Status	0.7	0.5	0	1
Education	12.5	1.5	10	15
Income	3500	1500	1000	7000
Health	0.8	0.2	0	1
Smoking	0.3	0.5	0	1
Alcohol	0.2	0.4	0	1
Exercise	0.5	0.5	0	1
Stress	0.6	0.5	0	1
Depression	0.4	0.5	0	1
Loneliness	0.5	0.5	0	1
Life Satisfaction	0.7	0.3	0	1
Quality of Life	0.8	0.2	0	1
Overall Health	0.9	0.1	0	1

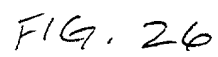


FIG. 26

DECLARATION, POWER OF ATTORNEY & PETITION Page <u>1</u> of <u>2</u>	<i>Attorney Docket No.</i>	0818.ACB.PT
	<i>Inventor(s)</i>	Daniel M. Jensen
	<i>Serial Number</i>	
	<i>Filing Date</i>	

I, Daniel M. Jensen, verily believe I am the original, first, and sole inventor of the subject matter of the invention or discovery entitled APPARATUS FOR FORMING LIGHTWEIGHT CONCRETE BLOCK, for which a patent is sought and which is described and claimed in the above-identified application; that I have reviewed and understand the contents of the above-identified specification, including the claims; and that I acknowledge the duty to disclose information which is material to the examination of this application in accordance with § 1.56(a) of Title 37 of the Code of Federal Regulations.

I declare further that all statements made herein of my knowledge are true and that all statements made on information and belief are believed to be true; and further that these statements were made with the knowledge that willful, false statements and the like so made are punishable by fine or imprisonment, or both, under § 1001 of Title 18 of the United States Code, and that such willful, false statements may jeopardize the validity of the application or any patent issuing thereon.

I hereby appoint as my attorneys and/or patent agents, JULIE K. MORRISS, Registration No. 33,263, RANDALL B. BATEMAN, Registration No. 37,774, DAVID W. O'BRYANT, Registration No 39,793, and FRANK W. COMPAGNI, Registration No. 40,567, all with full power of substitution and revocation, to prosecute this application and to

DECLARATION, POWER OF ATTORNEY & PETITION Page <u>2</u> of <u>2</u>	<i>Attorney Docket No.</i>	0818.ACB.PT
	<i>Inventor(s)</i>	Daniel M. Jensen
	<i>Serial Number</i>	
	<i>Filing Date</i>	

transact all business in the Patent and Trademark Office connected therewith.

All correspondence and telephonic communications should be directed to:

Frank W. Compagni

MORRISS, BATEMAN, O'BRYANT & COMPAGNI, P.C.
5882 South 900 East, Suite 300
Salt Lake City, Utah 84121
(801) 685-2302 telephone
(801) 685-2303 facsimile

Wherefore, I pray that Letters Patent be granted to me for the invention or discovery described and claimed in the foregoing specification and claims, declaration, power of attorney, and this petition.

Signed at Salt Lake City, Utah, this 14th day of September, 2000.
(city) (State)

INVENTOR:


Daniel M. Jensen

CITIZENSHIP:

United States

RESIDENCE:

County of Salt Lake, State of Utah, United States

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